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JUDGE DREDD VS JUDGE DEATH

Dredd lays down the law on the future of the FPS

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DOOM 3

We reveal the secrets of the world's biggest game. New screenshots and exclusive interview inside

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DELTA FORCE: BLACK HAWK DOWN
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TINY COMPO: What is Judge Dredd's first name?

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Divine Entertainment

The PC game is a valid form of art – discuss. Not the sort of question you might expect to see on an exam paper but times are a-changing. The recent Game On exhibition at London's Barbican Gallery proved that there's a rich heritage that stretches back decades. If you haven't caught the show it's still on for a couple of weeks before it moves up to Scotland.

Then there's the fact that DirectX9 is just around the corner, and although you might think it's not going to affect you, the new screenshots we've got from *Doom III* might make you think again. I could quite happily stare at them for a couple of hours while stroking my chin and talking about the Cinematic Period and its place in the history of PC games.

And how about the new *Judge Dredd* game from Brit developers Rebellion? Based on the stone-jawed character from *2000AD* that Rebellion liked so much they bought the company, the game shows how comic art transforms perfectly on to the small screen. Sylvester Stallone, turn to page 34 and see how it should have been done.

Art? Possibly. A fantastic form of entertainment that's progressing faster than any other both in terms of depth and visuals? Definitely.

But not everyone thinks the same way. The new Archbishop of Canterbury and honorary druid is the latest to weigh in on the furore surrounding games and their possible effects on children. Coming from a slightly unusual angle, his point is that games are part of a wider evil that stems from treating children like any other consumer in a capitalist society gone mad. That's all well and good, but it does tend to gloss over the good that games can do, lumping them all into the one basket and hoping that no one really looks any deeper. Which is what we're here to do. Besides I bet I could kick Rowan Williams' ass at *Quake III Arena* any day of the week, and that can't be a bad thing. Can it?

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Dredd is here to rewrite the laws of the first-person shooter

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Dave Woods
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PCZONE

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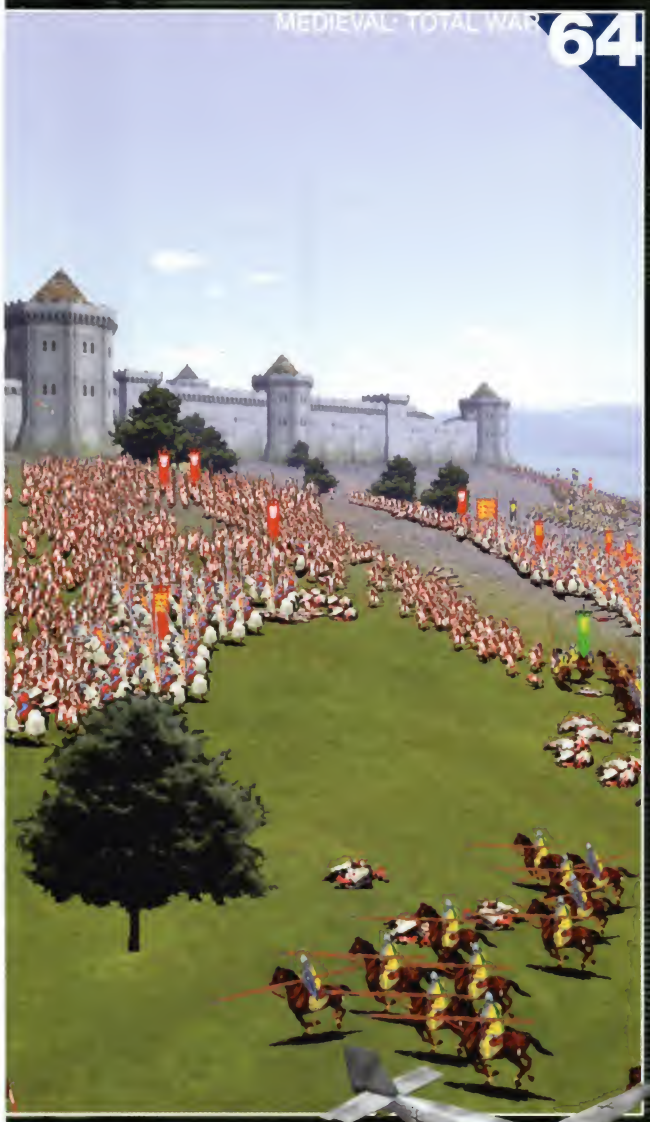

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TOP STORY

Once more onto the beach...

MEDAL OF HONOR: RELOAD

The award-winning WWII shooter is being expanded, but will it be in all the right places?

■ **BATTLING THE BULGE** Richie Shoemaker

ALL YOU NEED TO KNOW

DEVELOPER Dreamworks (EALA)
PUBLISHER Electronic Arts
EXPECTED RELEASE DATE December
WEBSITE mohaa.ea.com

IN SUMMARY

If *Medal Of Honor* was *Saving Private Ryan*, *Reload* is Spielberg's TV follow-up *Band Of Brothers*. While thousands prepare for massacre on June 6, 1944, you begin the game on June 5 – parachuting behind enemy lines to prepare the way for the D-Day landings, then onwards to Berlin for the final assault on Nazi Germany. If that's not enough, expect an arsenal of new weapons and more sophisticated team AI, as well as ten to 20 new multiplayer maps, with new gameplay modes and options.

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

Hello? Hellooooo? You should be aware by now that *Medal Of Honor: Allied Assault* is the best first-person shooter money can buy. Yes, even better than *Half-Life* in many respects. We shan't tell you again, is that clear? If you are without a copy, we suggest you enlist today and prepare yourself for what is sure to be an equally classic expansion.

Each of your team-mates in *Reload* will be fleshed out with a unique personality, such that you'll be encouraged to work even harder to ensure their survival.

THE ORIGINAL *Jedi Knight*, *Half-Life* and more recently *Ghost Recon* all have one thing in common over and above the simple fact that they are great first-person shooters. All have been incredibly successful of course, all have received the obligatory expansion pack, but in all three cases their respective add-ons have provided a whole lot more than just a collection of disparate and hastily constructed levels. In the case of *Mysteries Of The Sith*, LucasArts reached deep into the Star Wars universe and offered an experience far more involving that the original game. *Opposing Force* turned *Half-Life* on its head, twisting the focus of the central characters, and *Desert Siege* simply improved the original game in every respect.

Reload, the first add-on for the inspired *Medal Of Honor*, hopes to follow in the footsteps of these classic expansions and prove that even gaming perfection (relatively speaking) can be improved upon.

Certainly the developers have a difficult task on their hands. After all, how do you better the game that put a bullet between the eyes of *Half-Life*, the game that set the benchmark for first-person action for three years? Well, for starters, *Reload* will introduce a new character, US Airborne sergeant Jack Barnes. As Barnes, you begin your nine-mission tour of duty the night before *Allied Assault*'s infamous Omaha Beach landing, as you and your band of brothers parachute behind German lines to disrupt Nazi communications before the big day.

As some of you will know, the night before was almost as disastrous for the US Army as the day after, and if the developers manage to convey the confusion and carnage only half as successfully as they did for *MOH*'s Omaha Beach level we should be in for a treat.

After that it's off to a seemingly cushy posting in Belgium, where without warning Germany launched a desperate counter-attack through the Ardennes Forest in what has become known as the Battle Of The Bulge. Up against crack SS Stormtroopers and the new King Tiger tanks, the US forces would have been completely routed if it weren't for the weather and the Germans' lack of fuel.

"How do you better *Medal Of Honor*, the game that put a bullet between the eyes of *Half-Life*?"

Things won't get any easier when you join up with the Soviets either, as they begin their final advance on Berlin. Heavy street fighting is promised, although if realism is adhered to you can expect to be up against dogs strapped with explosives and 14-year-old boys hastily conscripted into the Hitler Youth. We might even be allowed to drive a Russian T-34 tank into the burning Reichstag.

EA isn't scrimping on the multiplayer game either. At least ten new multiplayer maps are under construction, with an equal amount of fan-made levels under consideration. As well as traditional deathmatch, assault and team deathmatch modes, we're also promised new multiplayer options, the rumour being that vehicles may be involved. Whatever the case, if EA delivers only half of what they promise, the end of the war can't come soon enough. PCZ

TOP STORY

A wolf in cheap clothing...

RETURN TO CASTLE WOLFENSTEIN: ENEMY TERRITORY

When is an add-on pack more than an add-on pack?

■ **MAN WITH THE PUNCHLINE** Dave Woods

ALL YOU NEED TO KNOW

DEVELOPER id/Mad Doc/Splash Damage/Grey Matter
PUBLISHER Activision
EXPECTED RELEASE DATE November 2002
WEBSITE www.idsoftware.com

IN SUMMARY

The battle of Castle Wolfenstein is over, but instead of getting a cushy desk job and a house in the country, you've got more work to do. This time, instead of flying solo you're the commander of an elite squad of AIs with missions taking you from Western Europe to Egypt. Expect to shoot people in the head and witness more occult occurrences, with a new single-player campaign and enhanced multiplayer.

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

id knows what was good about the previous game and is determined to make this the ultimate team-based shooter. Both multiplayer and single-player modes will revolve around a squad system, and you can look forward to intelligent bots, new classes and some snazzy new weapons.

It'll be interesting to see how the gaming population takes to *Enemy Territory*. *Return To Castle Wolfenstein* was a simple heads-down shooter but the expansion will require a lot more thought and co-operation.

WE DIDN'T GO nuts over *Return To Castle Wolfenstein*'s single-player game, but it did suffer by landing on our desks at the same time as the more substantial *Medal Of Honor*. Multiplayer was different. In short, it rocked, and quickly took over our lunch hours for a sustained spell, with new personality traits showing themselves in previously embittered hacks. News ed Anthony Holden, in particular, showed his human side when he decided that running around with a syringe healing comrades was preferable to getting in a fist-fight with Korda over *Quake III* duels.

The developers at id, in their heart of hearts, obviously agreed, and when we met up with them recently to pore over *Doom III*, they had an entirely welcome announcement to make. That is, that *Wolf*'s first add-on pack, *Enemy Territory*, will primarily build on the squad-based play of multiplayer *Wolfenstein*, with the addition of intelligent bots so you can play on your own and a team-based single-player campaign in which you'll control a squad of AI-driven comrades. What's more, *Enemy Territory* is now being released as a standalone product (you won't need the original to play it), which shows that id sees it as much more than a simple expansion. Think of it as *Wolfenstein 1.5* – not a true sequel but a worthy follow-up to one of the best shooters of all time.

Multiplayer and single-player are going to play out in a similar fashion, although there will be a strong storyline to guide you through your solo missions, with you again playing as Nazi killer BJ Blazcowicz. Two new classes are available, the Construction Engineer (who can perform such wartime heroics as rebuilding downed bridges and establishing forward spawn points) and the Covert Ops guy, whom you can send into 'enemy territory' to keep a track on the movements of the enemy team. The new real-time Command Map also lets you see your entire squad, which places a much greater emphasis on strategy and co-operation and takes away previous reliance on line of sight.

New weapons include the fantastic-looking grenade-launcher, the MG42 machine gun, the FG42 assault rifle and landmines. The latter have to be armed, at which point they'll be invisible to the opposing team (unless they send Covert Ops in) but still visible to you. Which should be fun.

"The AI guys understand the objectives and actually listen to you if you ask for stuff"

TODD HOLLENSHEAD
CEO, ID SOFTWARE

However, it's the inclusion of intelligent bots that provides the crucial piece of the jigsaw that was missing last time around. According to id CEO Todd Hollenshead they're already showing promise: "The behaviour overall is very impressive. You can expect lieutenants to provide ammo and medics to provide health – plus the AI guys actually understand the objectives and will guard certain points on the map. Also, and unlike a lot of players online, they'll actually listen to you if you ask for stuff."

Amen to that Mr Hollenshead, and amen to an 'expansion' pack that clearly has ideas above its station. According to id it's going to be 'ready when it's done' but we sent a Covert Ops guy in and he assures us that the ETA is November. Over and out. PZ

TOP STORY

Action to the maximus

THE GLADIATORS

ALL YOU NEED TO KNOW

DEVELOPER Eugen Systems
PUBLISHER Arxel Tribe
EXPECTED RELEASE DATE Q4 2002
WEBSITE thegladiators.arxeltribe.com

IN SUMMARY

Blending a standard RTS interface with a fast squad-based dynamic and arcade-inspired 3D visuals, *The Gladiators* is a stylish and appealing attempt to put some fun back into strategy gaming. Set in an alien gladiatorial arena, the gameplay is tight and action-focused, but offering no shortage of tactical depth.

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

With its bright cartoonish aesthetic and friendly interface, *The Gladiators* looks set to be a fast and exciting alternative to traditional strategic fiddling. Don't let its visual style and lack of pretension fool you: there's some seriously smart game design going on here, and the AI is stiletto sharp.

Some sought glory, fame and honour. We came for the pretty graphics

■ **IN THE ARENA** Anthony Holden

You'll be able to hear the crowd's response to the events in the Deathbowl throughout the battle. If things aren't exciting enough (presumably because you're being a stinking coward), they'll become enraged, prompting the officials to send in the enforcers.

WE MUST ADMIT, it was tempting to dismiss *The Gladiators* out of hand when it first flickered on the *PC ZONE* radar. With a name that sounded like a shameless bit of Hollywood coat-tail riding, and a look that screamed 'RTS for kids', *The Gladiators* seemed to have 'thumbs down' written all over it.

Luckily, Russell Crowe once taught us never to judge a gladiator by the cut of his loincloth, and a closer look at the game soon defied all adverse expectations. Far from being kiddy fodder, *The Gladiators* is a remarkably focused attempt to distill the action from the established RTS formula, yet without losing any of the essential tactical vigor.

To give it its full name, *The Gladiators: The Galactic Circus Games* has nothing to do with swords, sandals or oiled-up Romans grappling with pitchforks. On the contrary, the setting is a distant alien planet, one where the premier form of entertainment is a kind of gladiatorial arena called the Deathbowl. You enter the scene as a US Marine major called Callahan, who, through an unlikely series of events involving a secret space shuttle mission, a black hole, and an evil robotic space commander, finds himself fighting in the Deathbowl to save the future of the Galactic Empire. Heady stuff for a dumb grunt, but he is in the US marines after all.

The ensuing missions take place across a variety of expansive arenas, varying from palm-spotted deserts and steamy jungles to rugged snowy crests and narrow island archipelagos. Key to each level are a number of spawn zones, which must be discovered and captured before they can be used. Here you can spend stored energy, collected in the form of floating power-ups, to create new troops and vehicles. These include grunts, commandos, bazooka-men, choppers, APCs and M1 tanks. The same energy is used to heal your troops, so judicious energy management is a must.

Of course, this is an RTS, so there's more than one side to play as. Apart from Callahan's marines, you've got insectoid and robotic races, each with a typically weird and wonderful selection of units to play with, from dragons and giant bugs to mechanical spiders and cyborgs.

What you're left with is all-out, fast-paced war – on a very small scale. There's no base construction or resources to worry about, so it's all about clever use of terrain and tight unit management. Typically you'll move in squads of only a dozen or so units (depending on how you spend your energy), organised into groups and formations in typical RTS fashion. Given this pared down combat style (not to mention the finely honed AI), the most important tactical considerations are visibility and cover. The true line of sight operates brilliantly to make you think about the terrain, and the fact that almost all environmental objects are destructible adds a significant level of depth to this process.

Simple though it is, *The Gladiators* is already an impressive game. Colourful and cleverly executed, it should be a breath of fresh air in a rapidly stagnating genre. PZ

"Luckily, Russell Crowe once taught us never to judge a gladiator by the cut of his loincloth"

BULLETIN

EVENT HORIZON

■ **NEWS EDITOR** Anthony Holden

Bit of an event bonanza this month, with more games shows than you could shake a drunken fist at. For starters we packed the boss off to Dublin for a few days to see what Activision had up their sleeves at their annual booze-and-games fest, Activate. Quite a lot as it turned out, and while you may be vaguely interested in reading the latest on *Doom III* on page 40, an even more surprising delight awaits on page 10, with a look at the amazing new standalone *Wolfenstein* title.

Next, we finally made it down to the Barbican to see the Game On exhibition that's been on display for the past few months. While the show is certainly entertaining, we must confess we were a little disappointed with how much it has been scaled down from its original grand plans. It doesn't quite fulfil its brief of encompassing the history, culture and future of games, though to be fair this is only the first version of what is to be a steadily expanding entity (and the retro arcade gaming area is worth the price of admission alone). It's running until September 15, before moving on to lands unknown (aka Scotland), so there's still time to check it out.

And finally, ECTS is just around the corner. Kicking off at Earl's Court in London on August 29, ECTS is Europe's biggest games expo and promises three days of relentless noise, strobing VDUs and gaming guff. If you're really keen, you might want to wander down to the consumer section of the show, open to all and sundry. Maybe we'll see you there.

Criminal minded

The game that paved the way for *GTA III* is back to reclaim the mean streets

If you could go *inside* all these buildings, then we'd be impressed.

First-floor flat, recently refurbished, slight smell of sausages.

DESPITE ITS LIMITATIONS, and the fact that much of its gameplay was a shameless 3D translation of *Grand Theft Auto*, the original *Driver* is a certified classic. Fast cars, hot pursuits, insane stunts and a genuinely B-grade storyline proved an irresistible mix at the time, and the scale of the game's cities gave it plenty of longevity. And of course, in a classic case of artistic tit for tat, *Driver* later had a huge influence on *GTA*'s own 3D incarnation.

The over-ambitious sequel, the one that finally let you get out of your car and run around a bit, never made it to the PC. This despite the fact that its principle failure lay in demanding too much from its host console, the PSone.

However, Reflections Interactive is back with a third *Driver* game, and they're not about to repeat history by snubbing the most powerful gaming platform on the market. *Driver 3* is set to hit our PCs some time next year, bringing with it all the familiar crime/driving antics from the first game, along with some proper out-of-car gun-and-run action.

The game takes place across three massive cities – Miami, Nice and Istanbul – all recreated in astonishing detail. The plot once again puts you in the role of the wheelman – an undercover cop negotiating his way through the criminal underground in the guise of a skilled getaway driver.

The big question is, what can *Driver 3* possibly do to surpass the sublime *GTA III*? Details at this stage are scarce, though it's already clear that *Driver 3* is aiming to be different rather than better than Rockstar's classic. Reflections is certainly aiming for a much grittier, less comic book atmosphere, and tight mission scripting will be favoured over the freeform depravity of Liberty City.

We're also hopeful that the shooting aspect of the game will be more fully realised than *GTA*'s fairly throwaway shooting element. Indeed, chuck in a bit more drama and cinematic tension, and *Driver 3* could make *GTA III*'s comical thug life look positively juvenile. *Max Payne* meets *GTA*, anyone?

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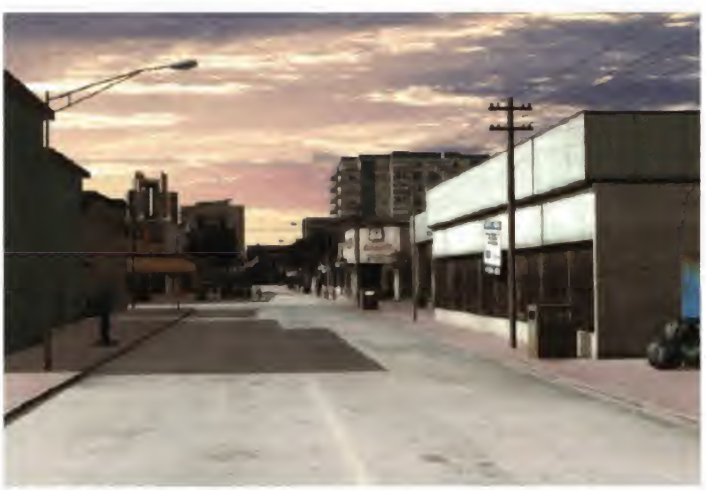

It's quiet. Almost too quiet.

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Latest charts and release dates

Staying alive

Survival means more than just shooting aliens, in Warthog's new FPS, *x10*

Never turn your back on a monkey with a spear.

You have to find shelter from the elements, even if there are aliens inside.

IT'S ALWAYS GOOD news when a new Warthog game is announced, especially when it's one that promises to revitalise the first-person shooter genre with a new slant on gun-toting action. Of course, the UK codeshop (of *Starlancer* fame) is already in the process of doing that with action hybrid *Mace Griffin Bounty Hunter*, but this new title promises to be far more than just a mere genre crossbreed.

Titled *x10*, the game is a sci-fi shooter set on an alien world, in which you play a soldier sent to investigate a mysteriously silenced research station. Though the game is aiming for a relatively freeform experience, the plot will eventually lead you across vast reaches of the planet, piloting a range of vehicles and battling various alien and human threats.

Nothing too earth-shattering so far we agree, but there is a twist. Instead of simply ploughing through hordes of enemies with a selection of bigger and bigger guns, *x10* shifts the emphasis towards survival in a hostile world. Lead designer Hal Sandbach explains: "We wanted to do something different, to get away from the largely linear corridor-based shooters that seem to be all over the place. As a team, we went away and came up with the basic concept of survival. Not a boring 'camping simulator' – that's definitely not what *x10* is about. What we want to get across is the feeling of the player versus the environment."

So instead of just thinking about when to shoot and when to run away, you'll have to think about food, clothing, shelter... What are the dangers and benefits of this environment? What creatures should I hunt and which should I avoid?

"The six different environments will each have their own challenges," Hal expands. "You start the game in a fairly cold environment, so the first priority is to find a safe place to stay. Later, you'll be able to eat the creatures in the game – some will prove to be less appetising than others, but that's for you to learn."

There are over ten vehicles in the game, each with a distinctive look and offering various benefits in different environments.

Of course the game will also feature its fair share of adrenaline-fuelled action, along with NPC interaction and a bit of light resource management.

Balancing all of these elements will be no easy thing, but if Warthog can pull it off *x10* could be a revelation.

Warthog • ETA TBC • www.warthog.co.uk

Halo meets *Outcast* with a dash of *Frontier House*.

SHORTS

EVERQUEST TACTICS

Warcraft is becoming an online RPG, so why not make *EverQuest* into an RTS? This is apparently the thinking at Sony Online Entertainment, given the recent announcement of an as yet unnamed strategy title based on the world of Norrath. Coding duties have fallen to Rapid Eye Entertainment, a new outfit founded by former *Might & Magic* developers. No release date has been summoned as yet.

ESCALATING CONFLICT

Conflict: Desert Storm isn't even out yet, but the eager beavers at SCi have nonetheless announced two sequels to its promising squad-based shooter. The first (due in autumn 2003) is a straight follow-up to the original game, to be called *Conflict: Desert Sabre*, while the second is a Vietnam War offshoot dubbed *Conflict: Missing Presumed Dead*, due autumn 2004.

POWER OF THE PRESS

Czech developer Mindware Studios has announced a stealthy new action/adventure title called *Cold War*. Harking back to the paranoia and intrigue of the old Soviet Union, the game casts you as Chaser Jones, an American reporter-cum-adventurer behind the Iron Curtain. Blending the gameplay and gadgets of the sneak 'em up with more traditional third-person action, the game is due next year.

Car wars

Post-Apocalyptic mayhem on the *Mad Max* tip, in *Bandits: Phoenix Rising*

REMEMBER LAST YEAR'S future racer *Ballistics*? You know the one – insanely fast racing on the inside of a pipe? We raved about it? No one bought it? Well, the good news is Swedish developer GRIN is back with another action-rammed vehicular romp, and this one's dubbed *Bandits: Phoenix Rising*.

Taking a lead from the console tradition of go-anywhere action games such as *Smuggler's Run* and *Vigilante 8*, *Bandits* asks you to drive, bomb and blast your way across a barren wasteland on a mission to steal a cache of gold. The mission-based single-player game puts you in the shoes of outback brigands Fennec and Rewdalf, who command a variety of different battle cars in their quest for money and glory.

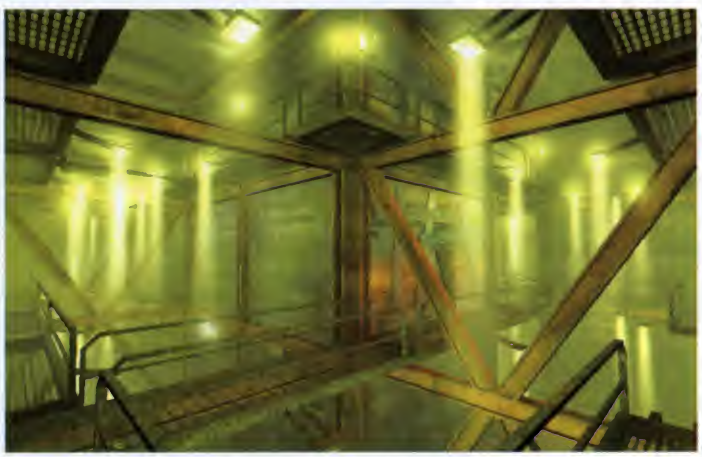
Like *Ballistics*, it's pretty basic stuff. And like *Ballistics*, it looks positively superb, boasting all sorts of fancy graphics tech and practically bursting with special effects. The vast environments, which range from desert dunes to icy steppes, are all fully deformable, with plenty of strategically placed canyons and hidden enemy bases.

The multiplayer game will also be a big part of *Bandits*' appeal. Aside from deathmatch and head-to-head modes, you'll be able to form gangs and roam the outlands looking for trouble. Whether or not the game will offer some sort of persistent online element is unclear, but the potential is certainly there.

GRIN's self-confessed ethos is to make 'games that play fast and look good', something they achieved with flying honours with *Ballistics*, and there's every indication they're about to do it again.

GRIN • ETA Q4 2002 • www.grin.se/bandits

Driving buggies across a desolate landscape, dodging craters left by stray missiles – my god, it's *Moon Patrol* in 3D!



I always knew I was destined for the catwalk.

Straight no...

Chaser, looking better than ever

THESE CAULDRON GUYS, the ones making *Chaser*, they just never let up. We keep telling them, yes, your game looks good, yes it reminds us of *Total Recall*, no, we can't wait to play it. Still they keep at us with the exclusive screenshots, every bloody month.

Unfortunately, they're always worth printing. The in-house CloakNT engine powering the game keeps coming up with new tricks, making for some impressive visual displays even in this age of *Doom III*. This time it's showing off some volumetric lighting and fog tricks, a bit of real-time-per-pixel something or other, and all sorts of other high-tech nonsense we couldn't even begin to name. In layman's terms, they look a bit nice.

So here they are then – the latest images from gritty sci-fi FPS *Chaser*, currently approaching completion at Bratislava's premier codeshop, Cauldron. Hope they're damn well happy.

Cauldron • ETA October • www.chasergame.com

The bloody estate agent told me this was an up and coming area.

another WAR

THE FIRST RPG TO BE SET DURING WWII

- another publisher
- another developer
- another war

MIRAGE INTERACTIVE

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EMULATION ZONE

Breaking news from the thriving world of emulation with retro reanimator Stuart Campbell

A RIDGE TOO FAR

NOT ENOUGH GAMES have sarcastic commentators. "Taking your time, aren't you?" sneers the narrator of *Ridge Racer 2* viciously as you struggle away from the start line after a rather nasty wheel spin. "What's wrong, *engine trouble*?"

Ridge Racer 2 is one of the lost arcade games, the ones that were never converted to any home format. In fairness, we didn't lose all that much – *RR2* was simply a brushed-up coin-op sequel to the original *Ridge Racer*, adding better graphics, new music, a two-player option and a rear-view mirror, but no new tracks. A sadder loss to *Ridge*-loving home gamers was *Rave Racer*, the 'true' arcade follow-up and one of the best *Ridges*, which was, slightly weirdly, slated to come exclusively to the PC as a flagship for a new graphics card (a Diamond something or other, from memory), but never showed up.

But of course, we're not just shooting the breeze here. Emu Zone is perhaps the most excited it's ever been to announce the release of the first working *Ridge Racer* emulator, Viva Nonno. Appearing out of nowhere, the emu runs the original *Ridge*, *RR2* and *Rave Racer*, and it does a phenomenally good job of it too. Gorgeous smoothed graphics, all the great pounding techno music and most of all, that facetious commentary in full effect. (Though let's be fair – he's not slow to give credit where it's due too, exclaiming "Excellent cornering!" with just a hint of surprise as you powerslide elegantly around a demanding hairpin, or "Brilliant driving!" as you swoop past the yellow Solvalu on the inside.)

Currently, the only fly in the ointment is a small timing issue, whereby even though the game maintains a creamy smooth 30/60fps display and all the sound is played at the right speed, the actual game is a little sluggish (though still extremely playable). However, Emulation Zone fully expects this glitch to have been fixed by the time you read this. Even if it isn't, this isn't just one of the greatest feats of emulation to date, it finally brings to the PC the best racing series in existence (*don't hold back Stu, just say it – Ed*). And on a format badly short of exciting arcade-style racers, it seems reason enough for some jumping up and down and whooping. So off you go.

"Gorgeous graphics, pounding techno and most of all, that facetious commentary"

LINKS

vivanonno.vg-network.com – Viva Nonno homepage

***Ridge Racer* always 0wned *Daytona USA*.**

Some of the most famous videogame scenery ever.

EMULATION OF THE MONTH

▲ RIDGE RACER 64 (N64)

Here's another of the more secret *Ridge* games – *Ridge Racer Renegade*. *Renegade* isn't really a *Ridge Racer* in its own right at all, but exists as the notional sequel to the PlayStation-only sequel *Ridge Racer Revolution*. *RR64*, which appeared right at the end of the N64's life, includes all the tracks from the original *Ridge*, all the tracks from *Revolution*, plus a new set under the *Renegade* banner, placed in a dusty frontier town in the rocky, windswept desert outside Ridge City. And just for laughs, *RR64* throws in lots of the cars from the PSone's brilliant *Ridge Racer Type 4* as well, finishing off an extremely well-rounded package that might have completely changed the racing-starved N64's fortunes had it been released earlier.

▼

More important than that, though, *RR64* plays absolutely beautifully, with a whole range of different handling styles and a pace that leaves every other *Ridge* game trailing in the dust. The only way *RR64* could be improved, in fact, would be if you could somehow play it in razor-sharp 1024x768 resolution, and on your PC. And what do you know, thanks to the latest incarnation of top N64 emu Project 64, that's exactly what you *can* do. So what are you waiting for? Christmas?

LINKS

www.pj64.net/iedefault.htm – Project 64 homepage

The fastest, smoothest *Ridge* ever.

SHORTS

CATS AND DOGS

If sales figures are to be believed, *The Sims* is the most popular PC game of all time, save perhaps *Minesweeper* and surfing for porn. Sure enough, publisher EA has now announced another unit-shifting expansion pack: *The Sims Unleashed*. As well as the usual slew of new careers, skins and objects, the big deal this time around is pets, with your sims now able to buy a variety of animals such as dogs, cats and turtles.

PUCK MAN

Champ Man creator Sports Interactive is turning its celebrated talents (and technology) in new directions with its next title, *Eastside Hockey Manager*. Beginning its life as a Finnish shareware game, the ice hockey title is SI's first venture into non-football territory, and is due some time next year.

WHEELS OF STEEL

Clever's Development, the brains behind off-road racing game *Screamer 4x4*, is back with another good-looking driving game, this time a post-apocalyptic cars 'n' guns affair tentatively named *Steel Of Haste*. The game pits three heavily tooled-up clans against each other in a series of frantic racing battles, and is due around Christmas.

EUROPEAN UNION

Napoleon is an imminent real-time strategy game based on the battles of a certain stumpy Frenchman between 1803 and 1812. Developed by an unknown Russian team, it's a murky top-down affair with an emphasis on large-scale strategy, and is due out on October 25.

Carpet-bombing runs should prove satisfying.

As ever, the Germans put up a strong defensive stance.

Frontal assault

Eidos joins the WWII RTS gold rush with *Frontline Attack*

LIKE THE SCRAMBLE to evacuate our boys from the beaches of Dunkirk, the rush to release WWII games of all genres continues, with Eidos' announcement that it will be releasing the eye-catching RTS *Frontline Attack: War Over Europe* this October. Formerly known as *World War II: Panzer Claws* (a far better name in our opinion), the game comes from new Polish developer In Images, formed by members of the now defunct Topware (*Earth 2150* and *The Moon Project*).

And you have to hand it to *Frontline Attack*. Using the brand new Earth-3 3D engine from German developer Reality Pump, it's perhaps the best-looking of all the WWII RTS games currently in development.

Players can fight as the Allies, Germans or Russians, with up to ten infantry types and 25 vehicle types per side. Day can turn to night mid-battle and the weather conditions can change at the drop of a hat, affecting visibility and movement. Other features include officers with special command abilities, long-range artillery and air strikes, and the ability to commandeer enemy weapons and equipment. Ammo supplies must be maintained, and mines, factories and money bunkers can all be captured.

As the game revolves around building and capturing structures to gain money for new troops, we guess the emphasis is not on realism. In fact, our concern is the game is not much more than an update of the *Earth 2150* system wrapped up in WWII visuals. 'Earth 1944', if you like.

In Images/Reality Pump • ETA October • www.eidosinteractive.co.uk

Hellraiser

Free-roaming role-player *Gothic II* grows more powerful by the day

NO IT'S NOT a game about shambling around a basement nightclub wearing white make-up and black PVC, looking for a girl who responds well to the 'you look dead tired; come sleep in my coffin' line. It is in fact the sequel to last year's impressive third-person RPG *Gothic*.

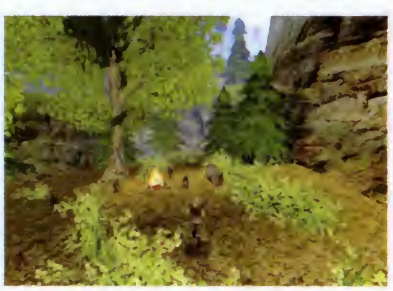
The game picks up where the last one finished, with the kingdom wracked by war with marauding orcs. But now the land faces the added turmoil of internal revolt as peasants rise up, sick of harsh taxes and bad leadership. To top it all off, a dimensional portal has opened up and, with the help of a possessed demon charmer, is unleashing the legions of terror upon the land.

Like its predecessor, *Gothic II* promises a massive amount of freedom in where you go, what you do, who you talk to and which factions you ally yourself with. Character development is largely open-ended, allowing you to become an out-and-out fighter, a thief, a crusading paladin, or even a skilled dragon rider.

The developers have also responded to fan feedback on the first game, tweaking a host of features. We're looking at improved AI for the monsters, the chance to forge your own weapons and mix your own potions and a reworked news system that means NPCs pick up word of recent events – including your own exploits – and mention them in their conversations.

Piranha Bytes • ETA November 29 • www.piranha-bytes.com

Don't bother mate – she's only a placeholder.



Throw another goblin on the barbie.

It's big, dark and a bit German.

Digging up the hatchet

Conquer the Americas, *Cossacks*-style

IF THE SIGHT of a heavily made-up Mel Gibson pretending that a bunch of slave-owning Indian persecutors were crusaders of freedom in *The Patriot* made you sick to the back teeth, then historical RTS *American Conquest* might just be the game for you.

Made by the team behind *Cossacks*, it's not just the War of Independence that's on offer, as *American Conquest* covers the period 1492 to 1813 and spans both American continents.

As with its forerunner, the emphasis in the battles is on size. Here we're talking anything up to 16,000 troops on the field at any given time, moulded into formations by commander and drummer units, just two of the 100 or so units available. There are 160 buildings on offer, all with various states of disrepair. Several resources have to be collected to sustain the war effort, including gold to pay mercenaries and food to keep troops' bellies full. And diplomacy will make an appearance as you try to persuade the locals to scalp the Frenchies over yonder rather than pillage your stockade.

The four single-player campaigns cover the American War Of Independence, the War Of Tecumseh, the Seven Years' War, and Pizarro's expedition. You can control forces from any of the sides represented, including the Dutch, French and English (scrapping over colonies), Creek Indians (trying to save their ancestral homelands from American expansion), and Incas and Mayans (getting slaughtered in their thousands by Spanish boomsticks). Those were the days, eh?

GSC Game World • ETA Q4 2002 • www.gsc-game.com

This grab shows off the much-vaunted ability to line men up in a courtyard.

Space booster

Empire Earth strikes back with interstellar add-on pack *Art Of Conquest*

IN A NUTSHELL, *Empire Earth* was the RTS version of *Civilization*, in which you guide a nation from the Stone Age to modern times in real time. Well, not *real* real time, I mean, who's got a few spare millennia to play strategy games?

What we have here is the game's first expansion pack, and we have to say we're impressed with the scope of what's been packed in there.

The three new campaigns (that's only one fewer than were in the original) take in the rise and fall of the Roman Empire, the Pacific theatre of WWII, and finally Asia in the 22nd century, sending players across space itself in search of new domains to colonise. To accompany these campaigns, each of the 21 civilisations will get a new unit, building or special power. A brief look at what they've got planned for the WWII campaign alone gives a mouth-watering indication of what's in store: SAS Commandos expert in destroying enemy structures, anti-infantry flamethrower troops and radiomen who can call in paratroopers at crucial moments during battles.

No, no Mr Lucas, they're 'laser-swords'.

Not content with their already impressive 3D engine, the Steelers have implemented a few visual improvements that should make the seas more shimmery, the flora and fauna more diverse and the aftermath of battles more devastating.

Multiplayer has been improved with an enhanced matchmaking system for online play, and the chance to get it on with a total of eight players simultaneously.

Stainless Steel Studios • ETA Q4 • empireearth.sierra.com/expansion

SHORTS

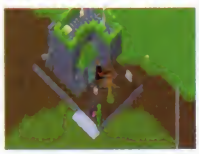
LEAGUE OF HEROES

Despite its continuing dominance of the online role-playing market, Sony Online is apparently not content, and is reportedly in negotiations with Marvel Entertainment to make a massively multiplayer game filled with Marvel Comic characters. The publishing giant is also looking into the possibility of a MMOG based on the *Terminator* films.

EA GETS PIERCED

Pierce Brosnan has signed up with EA to lend his voice-acting talents and likeness to the forthcoming Bond outing, *James Bond 007: Nightfire*. While it makes our recent cover image slightly redundant, the addition of an authentic Bond should lend plenty of atmosphere to the eagerly awaited shooter, due this Christmas.

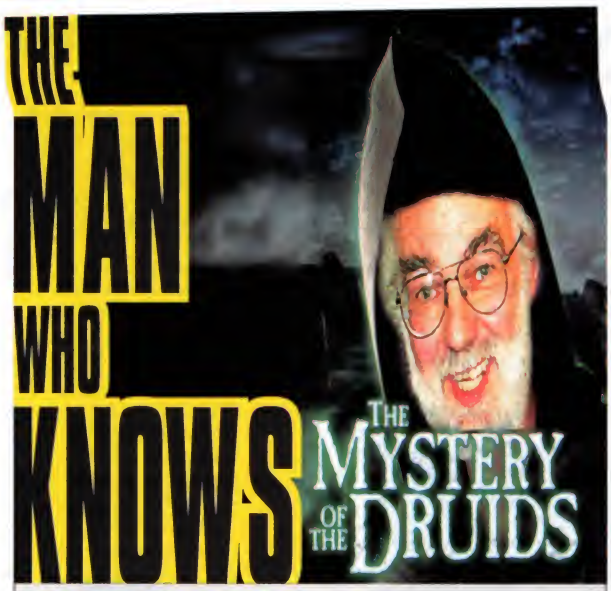
SHOWING ONE'S AGE



Origin Systems, creators of the seminal online role-player *Ultima Online*, recently announced a new extension to its fantasy universe, dubbed *Age Of Shadows*. The MMORPG expansion, set for release in early 2003, will add a substantial new realm to explore, two new professions, and tools for creating your own house.

UNSETTLING NEWS

Ubi Soft has announced the next game in quirky strategy/sim series *The Settlers*, currently going by the name *The Settlers 5*. However, it's unclear what the final game will be called, as developer Blue Byte is attempting to overhaul the series and sell it to a broader audience, courtesy of an 'innovative new gaming principle'. More on this soon.



A MESSENGER OF GOD has decried computer games as the work of the **Devil**. The new **Archbishop of Canterbury** slammed the innocuous pastime, claiming that it warps the minds of the young, reducing them to little more than unwitting zombies, force-fed a hateful diet of misery and despair. In a book serialised by ***The Times***, **Rowan Williams** blasted games on the basis that they typify modern society's shameless perception of the young as merely another type of consumer. In something of a free-for-all rant, the self-styled social critic also lambasted **Walt Disney**, child talent shows, and plimsolls. The spiritual head of the **Church of England** chanted: "Anything but innocuous is the conscription of children into fetishist hysteria of style wars. It is still mercifully rare to murder for a pair of trainers, or to commit suicide because of an inability to keep up with peer group fashion; but what can we say about a marketing culture that so openly feeds and colludes with obsession?" Having got that off his chest, the hat-wearing druid went on to say how much he liked ***The Simpsons***, describing it as "one of the most subtle pieces of propaganda in the cause of sense, humility and virtue." However, he has yet to break his silence over the forthcoming ***Doom III***.

The developers of that game, **id Software**, have been forced to defend themselves against sensationalist media stories. **Todd Hollenshead** bleated: "We are scapegoats, an easy target for the media and critics because they don't understand videogames, and they fear what they don't understand. It was the same with rock 'n' roll and comic books. It's driven by fear and paranoia." In response to mindless speculation that games turn youngsters into violent criminals, the long-haired **Texan** turned to the irrefutable science of statistics, claiming: "Since 1994, the videogame biz has increased annually by 50 per cent, while juvenile crime is down by 34 per cent." Denying that *Doom III* will spawn a generation of psychopaths, the funny-named **American** drawled: "It has absolutely no relation to the real world. It's easy to distinguish between fantasy and reality."

However, games can still rot your brain, turning you into an angry friendless automaton with little more than basic motor neurone functions, research in **Japan** has found. **Professor Akio Mori** of **Nihon University** claims that the longer people spend playing videogames, the less activity they show in the prefrontal region of their brains, which governs emotion and creativity. According to his research, brain activity in people who play a lot of games does not recover in the periods when they are not playing games. Though his conclusions have been roundly pooh-poohed by his peers, Mori remains undeterred, shrieking: "Many videogames stir up tension and a feeling of fear, and there is concern that this could have an effect on the autonomic nerves. During childhood, playing outside with friends, not videogames, is the best option." But what if it's raining?

"In something of a free-for-all rant, the self-styled social critic also lambasted Walt Disney, child talent shows, and plimsolls"

The Worm turns 3D

The original bait 'em up gets a dimensional makeover...

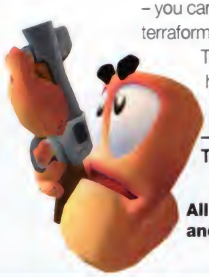
FROM ITS INCEPTION in 1995, the *Worms* franchise has made a virtue of its rigidly old-skool turn-based 2D formula. Bar the puzzle offshoot *Worms Blast*, this has been the blueprint for three and a half incarnations and has provided us with some of the funniest invertebrate moments since Prince Charles shat five metres of tapeworm following a state visit to Botswana.

But that's all set to change with the release of *Worms 3*, as developer Team 17 has taken the plunge into full 3D. The game is set to follow fundamentally the same formula, with players taking turns to move and attack as their teams of wriggling warriors slaughter each other in a variety of comical ways.

The developers seem quite excited about their 3D engine, as it allows for a massive amount of detail, right down to individual worm lip-synching. But more importantly, the engine features completely deformable terrain. Drilling tunnels under your enemy, negotiating craters left by air strikes, blasting makeshift foxholes with grenades – you can expect all manner of devious terraforming to be part of your average bout.

The game is quite a way off yet, but we'll have the first screenshots for your perusal very soon.

Team 17 • ETA 2003 • www.worms3.com



All the familiar wormy weapons and more will be on offer.

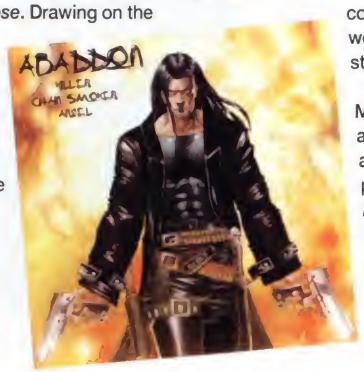
A grisly before and after shows the blood and guts angle in full effect.

Guns 'n' rosaries

Blood, bullet-time and The Bible in 3DO's new splatterfest

NOT THE MOST appropriate collection of concepts you might think, but this is the killer mix chosen by The 3DO Company for its recently revealed horror-action title, *Four Horsemen Of The Apocalypse*. Drawing on the artistic talents of comic legend Simon Bisley, the game charts the trials of the archangel Abaddon during a modern-day Armageddon.

As Abaddon, you'll battle against the minions of hell and the four Plagues of Mankind, on a quest to locate God's chosen ones and save the world from destruction. Swords, guns and magic are your weapons of choice, with an emphasis on gory melee action and spectacular finishing moves. Unfortunately, the Chosen happen to be a prostitute, a serial killer and a corrupt politician, so things won't be altogether straightforward.



Says 3DO's Michael Mendheim: "We're going all-out with mature content and violence of Biblical proportions. It's like *The Matrix* meets *Hellraiser*."

Needless to say, we'll be the judges of that.

3DO • ETA Autumn 2003 • www.3do.com

Miami Vice

Grand Theft Auto III goes back to the '80s with *Vice City*

DUST OFF YOUR white strides and pastel T-shirts, slip on your islander casuals – we're going back to Vice City.

These are the first screenshots of *Grand Theft Auto: Vice City*, the standalone follow-up to the criminally enjoyable *GTA III*. This time we step back into the era of big hair and leg warmers, and a plot involving power struggles and greed at the highest levels. Not to mention stealing cars and shooting people.

Miami Vice is clearly the chief point of reference (or reverence...) for the new title, with its vulgar displays of '80s glamour and decadence and familiar backdrop of drugs, corruption and sleaze. The fashions alone should be hilarious.

Though the game is set to use the same engine as *Grand Theft Auto III*, we're reliably informed that the tropical environs of Vice City will be even larger than the already-massive Liberty City. Expect all manner of '80s cars, music and other artefacts to be present, along with, apparently, golf buggies. Other potential additions include motorbikes, notably absent from the previous game, possibly a few more boats, and even a new lead character given the shift in time period.

Of course, even if *GTA: Vice City* offers only half the scope and humour of its predecessor, it's still going to be an essential purchase. And we can't wait to hear the radio chat.

Rockstar • ETA November • www.kentpaul.com

***Caddyshack* is another key reference point.**

This pic shows off the game's impressive use of curved surfaces...

Man's best friend

Another day, another tactical FPS. Except this one's got an idea...

SPECNAZ: PROJECT WOLF is a new outdoor tactical FPS in the vein of *Ghost Recon*. But before you start yawning and rolling your eyes, there is a cunning twist, and a pretty cool one at that.

Based on the Russian special forces of the same name, *Specnaz* revolves around a familiar selection of objective-based missions – search and destroy, assassination, recon – the difference being that you invariably operate with a sidekick. Rubbish, you might say, seen it ten times before. But wait – this time your sidekick can carry grenades, anti-tank mines, semtex and other gadgets for you. No big deal? Well, your support guy can also be tracked by GPS, and will respond directly to commands such as halt, drop, run and so on. Not impressed? What if we told you your support unit could also bite enemies in the ass when needs be, because it's a highly intelligent, super-trained canine battle machine? Huh? Huh? Well, we thought it was cool...

You see, the story goes that the Russian military has been researching animal intelligence since the '50s, and now uses trained wolves alongside its Special Forces operatives. You're part of Russia's elite forces, codenamed Wolf1, on a covert mission to retrieve missing nuclear warheads from various parts of the world formerly under Soviet influence. Wolf2, your canine companion, will offer support. It's kind of like *Delta Force* meets *C.H.O.M.P.S.*, and for that reason alone, we love it.

Byte Software • ETA 2003 • www.byte.sk/project/specnaz

Until CHOMPS the robot dog gets his own game, we'll happily settle for *Specnaz*.

SHORTS

FIFA MANAGER

If anyone is in a position to win back a bit of ground from *Champ Man* in the footie management turf war, it's Electronic Arts. The world's biggest games publisher recently announced *Total Club Manager 2003*, the successor to its dubious *Premier League Manager* series. The new game has been completely rethought and rebuilt, incorporating the latest *FIFA* engine for 3D matchplay. All the standard elements are present, along with advanced training options and a streamlined new interface. A release date is yet to be confirmed.

JOWOOD SOCCER

But wait! By the time EA's effort sees the light of day you might already be totally hooked on another footie management game, such as the boldly titled *Soccer Manager* from JoWooD. Known as *Fussball Manager* in its native Germany, *Soccer Manager* will feature a variety of domestic and international competitions, a "huge player database" and an isometric 2D match engine. Focusing on accessibility and fast, action-packed gameplay, the game is due September 27.

IMMORTAL COMBAT

With its innovative army control systems and superb interface, some thought TimeGate Studios' *Kohan: Immortal Sovereigns* was the most original RTS since *Shogun*. We didn't agree, though we thoroughly enjoyed the recent follow-up *Ahriman's Gift*. The fully fledged sequel, *Kohan II*, is now in production, and though not expected out until late next year, it's shaping up very nicely. Six new races, hugely enhanced army formations, new flying units and siege engines as well as a whole bunch of new immortal Kohan Heroes will be on offer, all brought to life by a new fully 3D game engine. Start sharpening your battleaxes now.

CHARTS

In association with **VIRGIN MEGASTORES**

Your one-stop guide to game releases past, present and future. Whether a game is lost, looming or selling like sim-cakes, this is where you'll find it

ChartTrack TOP 10

ELSPA

		TITLE	WEEKS IN CHART	SCORE
1	NEW	**WARCRAFT III: REIGN OF CHAOS**	4	85%
2	▲	THE SIMS: ON HOLIDAY	17	66%
3	▼	NEVERWINTER NIGHTS	5	91%
4	▼	GRAND THEFT AUTO III	10	95%
5	NEW	DELTA FORCE: TASK FORCE DAGGER	1	44%
6	▲	THE SIMS	129	86%
7	▲	THE SIMS: HOT DATE	36	71%
8	▼	MEDAL OF HONOR: ALLIED ASSAULT	24	94%
9	NEW	ZOO TYCOON: DINOSAUR DIGS	1	NA
10	▼	SOLDIER OF FORTUNE II: DOUBLE HELIX	9	92%

YOUR SHOUT

Have your say at www.pczone.co.uk

A 50-50 split this month – five top quality games and an equal amount of dross. One thing's for sure though, the charts are looking a lot healthier than this time last year.
dillweed

Even though it does nothing new, I can understand why *Warcraft III* is selling so well – the multiplayer is great and the story better than any movie I've seen lately.
saBreman

Task Force Dagger looks absolutely dire – why are people buying this nonsense? The *Land Warrior* engine was out of date when it came out two years ago!
carjack

Grand Theft Auto III is amazing. I thought this game was good on PS2, but looking back, the shooting part was completely crap without mouse support. Bring on *Vice City*!
bigstevo

Virgin megastores TOP 10

1	MAX PAYNE
2	NEVERWINTER NIGHTS
3	WARCRAFT III: REIGN OF CHAOS
4	GRAND THEFT AUTO III
5	THE SIMS: ON HOLIDAY
6	MEDAL OF HONOR: ALLIED ASSAULT
7	CHAMPIONSHIP MANAGER 01/02
8	ZOO TYCOON: DINOSAUR DIGS
9	OPERATION FLASHPOINT: RESISTANCE
10	SOLDIER OF FORTUNE II: DOUBLE HELIX

COMPETITION

Virgin megastores

Win the entire Virgin Top 10!

Once again, *PC ZONE* and Virgin have teamed up to give you the chance to win every game in the current Virgin Top 10. All you have to do to enter the draw is answer the following simple question:

QUESTION: What are the four races you can play as in Blizzard's superb new RTS *Warcraft III: Reign Of Chaos*?

Answers on a postcard to: *PC ZONE* Chart Compo (CPCZ10A), Dennis Publishing, PO Box 154, Bradford BD1 5RZ. Closing date: September 18, 2002

- Please include your name, address, daytime phone number, email address, job title and company name (and age if under 18).
- Please tell us if you do not wish to receive details of further special offers or new products from other companies.
- Please indicate whether you are a current subscriber to *PC ZONE*.

Terms and conditions: winners will be notified by post. No cash alternative. Prizes not necessarily as shown. No correspondence will be entered into. The editor's decision is final. All the other usual competition rules, conditions and restrictions apply.

CHART COMMENT

BASED ON CHART-TRACK TOP 10

AS PREDICTED, *Warcraft III* wastes no time in climbing to the top of the charts, where it has now sat for almost a month. While it has not revolutionised the genre in the way we hoped, it is nonetheless a substantial, crowd-pleasing RTS, and is likely to remain in the upper reaches of the charts for a good few months.

While the rest is more or less predictable, the sight of a *Zoo Tycoon* add-on at number nine raises a few eyebrows, though given the popularity of the original we should have seen it coming. Similarly, the strong charting of *Task Force Dagger* (reviewed page 84) proves the ongoing popularity of the *Delta Force* franchise, still riding on the loyalty of its strong online following.

For trivia collectors, there's another new release hovering just outside the top ten, one that should have come out about four months ago: *Sid Meier's Sim Golf*. The game was 'finished', according to EA, when we reviewed it in issue 113, but clearly it was taken back for an overhaul after some less than enthusiastic reviews. The mediocre chart position suggests the delay was not a great idea. Hey, they should have done what everyone else does – release it bugged and worry about the patch later.

Anthony Holden

MISSING IN ACTION

The war's not over until the last game comes home...

Unreal Tournament 2003

YES, YES, WE had it down for a mid-August release last month, and clearly that didn't happen. So where the hell is it? Believe you me, *PC Zone* wants to know as badly as the rest of you. This transcendent new multiplayer shooter *is* the game we'll all be playing on the office LAN for the next 12 months, but not until at least October. (Unless you count the beta version that was leaked on the Net a few months back.)

No reason has been given for the delay, and it's now due, very tentatively, some time in late October. Make that November.

Digital Extremes• ETA October • www.digitalextremes.com

Tribes: Fast Attack

THE TRIBES 2 curse has claimed another victim. First the game was released heavily bugged, then developers Dynamix were sacked en masse by Sierra… Now, the proposed follow-up, *Tribes: Fast Attack*, has been cancelled. This coolly anticipated title was to expand the shooter's offline appeal with an extensive new single-player campaign and a few new maps and mods, but publisher Sierra saw it as too similar to existing *Tribes 2* gameplay. Any remaining *Tribes* fans can console themselves with the knowledge that all the new material that did get made for the package is to be released free on the Net anyway.

Sierra Entertainment • Killed In Action • www.sierra.com

Lord Of The Rings: The Two Towers

MERE WEEKS AFTER we receieved confirmation from EA that their movie-licensed *Lord Of The Rings* adventure was indeed coming to PC (as reported last issue), rumours have come our way that the PC game has in fact been cancelled. Sources in the industry tell us that at least one of EA's *LOTR* games has been given the chop, and at time of print it seems almost certain that it's *The Two Towers* PC game. Apparently the title was not on schedule, and in danger of shipping too long after the film for EA's liking. There's no official word from EA just yet.

Ritual/Stormfront • Killed In Action? • www.lordoftherings.ea.com

US TOP 10

1	WARCRAFT III: REIGN OF CHAOS
2	THE SIMS: VACATION
3	THE SIMS
4	NEVERWINTER NIGHTS
5	MEDAL OF HONOR: ALLIED ASSAULT
6	BACKYARD BASEBALL 2003
7	GRAND THEFT AUTO III
8	ZOO TYCOON
9	THE SIMS: HOT DATE
10	THE SIMS: LIVIN' LARGE

INCOMING!

These are the big games that are going on sale in the next month or so. All dates are correct at the time of going to press, but we'd check ahead before running down to the shops in the driving rain.

GAME	PUBLISHER	RELEASE DATE
Mafia	Take 2	August 30
Tac Ops: Assault On Terror	Infogrames	August 30
Sudden Strike II	CDV	August 30
Medieval: Total War	Activision	August 30
Divine Divinity	CDV	September 13
Battlefield 1942	EA	September 20
Stronghold: Crusader	Take 2	September 20
The Thing	VU Games	September 20
Conflict: Desert Storm	SCi	September 20
Need For Speed: Hot Pursuit 2	EA	September 27

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activision.com

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totalwar.com

LOST AND FOUND

For every great videogame you've ever played, there's another one out there somewhere that lost its way. But despair not, for whether they were canned, banned, or stuck in Japan, the lost games of yesteryear can now be retrieved through the wonders of your PC. *Stuart Campbell* is your super-sleuth

AS FAR as I'm concerned, you can keep your *Sims*, your *Championship Managers* and your *Arcanum: Of Steamworks And Magick Obscuras* – the best reason for owning a PC is emulating old games. But it's not just that retrogaming allows you to play 50,000 old games from the days when you were just a spotty school kid, without cluttering up your home with 100-odd frankly unattractive old games machines. The very best thing about retrogaming is that it also gives you the chance to play games that you *didn't* play when you were just a spotty school kid. Why? Because they're the Forgotten Ones, the games that, for one reason or another, were never released. Until recent times, it looked as though these games would simply vanish from human consciousness, all the efforts expended on them rendered worthless forever. But thanks to the mighty power of emulation they're yours to command without having to hunt through the seedy underbelly of eBay, or hitchhike to Bolivia to play the world's last surviving *Granny And The Gators* machine.

Here now, *PC ZONE* presents a small selection of the best, most interesting and just plain weirdest Games That Never Came Out.

This is *Final Fantasy 1*. Or possibly *2*.

One of the *Final Fantasy 3*s, we think. Your guess is as good as ours.

TENGEN TETRIS (NES)

The best version of the most addictive game ever?

What have you got if you've got a room full of lawyers up to their necks in dogshit? The answer, of course, is: 'Not enough dogshit.' And if you ever found yourself in court being sued for using that old joke, *Tengen Tetris* is a perfect defence. (NB: not legally true.)

If you've read any of the better books on videogame history, you'll know about the dizzying mess of rights that surrounded the worldwide licensing of *Tetris*. We won't go into the details – all you need to know is that the biggest casualty of the whole scrog-up was Tengen's excellent NES port of *Tetris*, which for many people remains the best version ever (perhaps excluding the Game Boy one). Sadly, lawyers ensured that it was banned from sale and Tengen's entire stock of cartridges smashed up by big tattooed blokes with hammers (probably), forcing consumers to opt for a markedly inferior version of the game produced by Nintendo. Now, however, a mere 20 or so years later, you can thumb your noses at them all by playing the good one again. That'll learn 'em. (Or in fact it won't.)

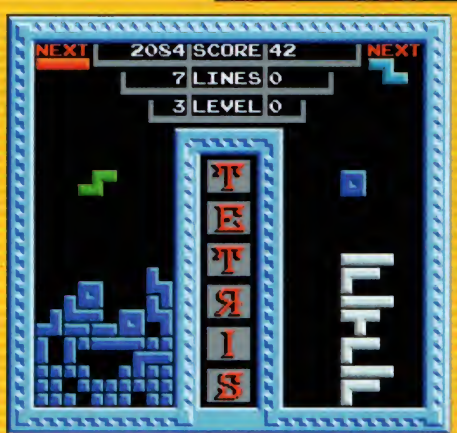
EMULATE IT WITH: RockNES X • rocknes.kinox.org

FINAL FANTASY 1-6 (NES/SNES)

No fancy CGI nonsense, this is on the old-skool tip

If you're a *Final Fantasy* fan, you're probably a bit simple-minded (being unable to cope with any kind of game where you have to do much more than press the 'X' button a lot for 50 hours). So the last thing you need is any more confusion brought about by the fact that Square adopted a completely random policy towards releasing the earlier *Final Fantasies* outside of Japan.

While some of the games in the series were released, if belatedly, some of them never came out at all, with others given



***Tengen Tetris*: two players, great. Nintendo *Tetris*: One player only, rubbish.**

HAVE YOU SEEN THIS GAME?
DINGO
One classic videogame, missing since 1983, black glossy coat, shaggy tail, answers to the name 'Dingo'.
contact pczone at lost@pczone.co.uk with any information

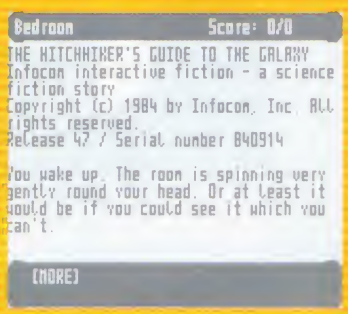
the titles of entirely different games in different territories. (The Japanese *Final Fantasy 6* was released in the US as *Final Fantasy 3*, for example. Or was it the other way round...?) Anyway, the point is, thanks to the magical world of emulation, not only can all you *FF* fans finally play the entire series, but a keen bunch of nerdy devotees has fully translated all the Japan-only games into English as well. The mind boggles.

EMULATE IT WITH: RockNES X • rocknes.kinox.org

THE INFOCOM COLLECTION (GAME BOY)
The future of text messaging

Emulation has done some truly great things in its few short years of existence, preserving a huge wealth of cultural history that, if left to the games industry, would all be buried in the Arizona desert by now. It's also culpable, however, for what may very well be the world's all-time worst idea, namely the conversion of all of Infocom's famous early-'80s text adventures to the Game Boy – the work of some ultra-dedicated but insanely misguided lunatic.

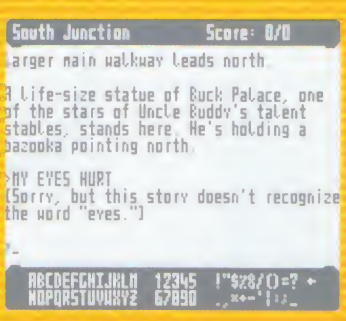
You might think that it'd be a hideous chore inputting the phrase 'GO NORTH AND PUNCH DRAGON UP BRACKET'



***Hitch-Hikers Guide*, just how you remember it.**

using only a four-way joypad and two fire buttons, but chances are you'd still be wildly underestimating the sheer hell of it by a good 500 per cent. Astoundingly, though, several mobile-phone-game developers would have us believe that playing stuff like this (and *Championship Manager*) on our mobiles represents the future of gaming. May God have mercy on our souls.

EMULATE IT WITH: Visual Boy Advance • vboy.emuhq.com



Weeks of fun on the train.

***Toilet Kids*: scat or die.**

TOILET KIDS (PC ENGINE)
Being kids who fight flying toilets of course

Since NEC's superb PC Engine console was never released in Europe at all, you could dub pretty much any of its hundreds of games as 'lost', or indeed just call the machine itself a secret and be done with it. Anyhow, at first glance this game seems like a bog-standard (sorry) vertically-scrolling shoot 'em up (no, madam, I said '*shoot* 'em up!') of the sort the PCE specialised in. After a few seconds though, you're assaulted by gun emplacements in the shape of toilets and bare-arsed ground troops, all enthusiastically firing round, brown globs of – well, let's momentarily assume it's mud, eh? – at you (though what they're doing with a load of mud up their backsides is anyone's guess). Shortly afterwards you encounter flying beasties quacking out great chuffs of noxious gas, and even enemies with – oh yes – turtles' heads. It gets even weirder after that, but the most remarkable thing is how much more you care about avoiding a hail of enemy fire when it's, quite literally, a shitstorm. Urgh. Those wacky Japanese, eh?

EMULATE IT WITH: Magic Engine • www.magicengine.com

SUPER 3D NOAH'S ARK (SNES)
Stealing in the name of The Lord

The games industry's keen sense of moral probity was put to a severe test by this one back in the mid-'90s. Produced by a US company called Wisdom Tree that specialised in Bible-themed games, the game was a straight rip-off of *Wolfenstein 3D*, using the same code and maze

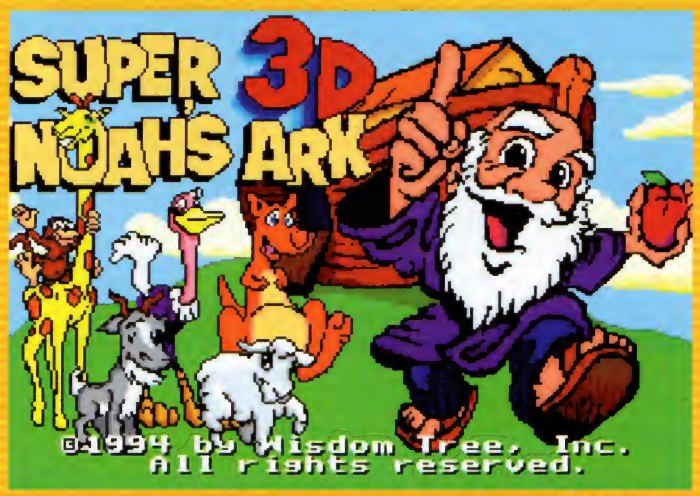
Oh dear. There's a few of them.

layouts, but with all the soldiers and Nazis replaced by the animals of the Ark, which you (as Noah) had to run around 'pacifying' by throwing food at them before they started fighting, shagging or crapping all over the place. (Of course, since there were considerably more than two of each enemy in *Wolfenstein*, Noah's ark was inexplicably overpopulated this time round.) Oddly, Wisdom Tree completely escaped being sued, not to mention pulverised with thunderbolts for breaking that commandment about stealing, leading to the inescapable conclusion that if you want to pirate games, you'll probably be all right as long as you do it from a church hall and wear a dog collar.

EMULATE IT WITH: SNES9x • www.snes9x.com

THRILL KILL (PSONE)
Children avert thine eyes. This one is pure filth

Shock-horror beat 'em up *Thrill Kill* was another unlikely casualty of one of the games industry's rare outbreaks of taste. After its original would-be publisher encountered some economic difficulties, the gore-splattered game (in which leather-clad dominatrixes reached 'climax' on performing a fatal finishing move and suchlike) was bought by EA, who promptly canned it in an attempt to prevent impressionable and vulnerable gamers being sullied by its awful depravity (and turned it into a beat 'em up based on the Wu Tang Clan instead). However, what with the games industry's security being famously leakier than a torpedoed sieve, it was far too late to prevent copies of the original game being smuggled out and hastily distributed to the 'underground', from where it's been sold at market stalls and car boot sales ever since, like the 'video nasties' of yore.



***Super 3D Noah's Ark*: *Wolfenstein* for the righteous of heart.**

This looks like it's another pic from *Toilet Kids*. In fact it's *Thrill Kill*.

Not that you have to get your hands dirty dealing with such people, of course – just find the ROM, boot it up on your PlayStation emulator, be gravely appalled, and go off to write a letter to your local MP.

EMULATE IT WITH: FPSe • www.amidog.com/emu/fpse

DINGO (ARCADE)
Strewth! It's got me baby!

Even today, most veteran UK gamers are only vaguely aware that the company they knew and loved as Ultimate Play The Game, authors of the finest Spectrum software in existence, had a whole other life producing games for Nintendo as Rare Ltd. Even less well known is the firm's arcade heritage, which stretches right back to the earliest days of the Spectrum with games like 1983's *Dingo*. The graphic style (right down to the text font) is instantly identifiable as Ultimate, but the gameplay (collect the fruit and, er, that's it, on an infinite number of identical levels) makes even the likes of *Cookie* and *Jet-Pac* feel like playing *IL-2 Sturmovik* with the manual in Russian. Rubbish, frankly. They'll never amount to anything.

EMULATE IT WITH: MAME v0.61 • www.mame.net

The less traditional spelling of 'blackcurrant'.

ACG being, of course, Ashby Computer Graphics, or Ultimate.

"Oof, there goes me Ribena."

GRANNY AND THE GATORS (PINBALL)
Mrs Brady – Jungle Lady

Emulation Zone has already brought you news of *Baby Pac-Man*, the first in Bally's early-'80s series of pinball/videogame hybrids. Now, via the magic of Visual Pinball, you can play, for the first time ever in the UK, the second and last in the ill-fated line, *Granny And The Gators*. The videogame aspect is a predecessor of Atari's much later *Toobin'*, whereby you pedal your inexplicably located Granny up the Amazon, avoiding crocodiles and angry natives. Occasionally you steer into little creeks where, implausibly, you found some miniature pinball machines on which Granny can while away a few happy minutes before getting back to hunting for treasure in the rainforest. Look, we don't come up with these plots, we're just telling you about them, OK?

EMULATE IT WITH: Visual Pinball • www.randydavis.com/vp

"If you want to pirate games, you'll probably be all right if you do it from a church hall and wear a dog collar"

Back to life: the bizarre arcade/pinball hybrid *Granny and the Gators*.

***Super Cobra*: hasn't aged too well.**

SUPER COBRA (ADVENTUREVISION)
Chopper action from one of the worst gaming devices ever conceived

In the long dark days before the Game Boy, miniaturised videogaming was still something of a fanciful dream. Producing displays more complex than a Game & Watch still required screen technology the size of the Space Shuttle, so hardware firms tried all sorts of trickery to achieve usable displays. The Vectrex was one such attempt, but much less known was Entex's Adventurevision, a bizarre little console that used a set of fast-spinning mirrors to produce a two-colour red-and-black display that looked not unlike that of Nintendo's mid-'90s flop the Virtual Boy. The Adventurevision had an incredibly limited release, and only about six survive today, along with a tiny handful of copies of the only four known games ever produced for the machine.

All four, ambitiously, were coin-op conversions, including *Defender* and *Turtles*. But the most successful was the port of Stern's helicopter-based *Scramble* sequel *Super Cobra*, rendered as a stupendously addictive cavern-negotiating mini-epic so colossally demanding that most Adventurevision owners probably smashed their fragile little mirrors into a million pieces while giving the machine a savage *Super Cobra*-inspired pounding. No wonder there's only six left.

EMULATE IT WITH: MESS • mess.emuverse.com

SINISTAR (BBC MICRO)
I say, old chap, it lives

When Atarisoft took the big leap into the home computer software market in the mid-'80s, it was the sort of leap you make from a burning building, in more than one respect. Partly, of course, because by that point in time (the home console market having recently imploded) Atari was pretty much a burning building anyway, and partly because Atarisoft just grabbed the nearest things to hand and stuffed them in a pillowcase. Hence the company's release schedule for the wide variety of platforms it supported seemed to comprise titles chosen by chucking a dart at a list of intellectual properties. Though Atarisoft brought out games for all the major platforms of the day, it elected for some reason to release the cult Williams space blaster *Sinistar* on only one format anywhere in the world – the genteel, academic BBC Micro. Bereft of both of *Sinistar*'s unique selling points (the booming, terrifying voice of the *Sinistar* itself, and the strange omni-directional joystick), the port was nevertheless a pretty impressive recreation of the coin-op, a judgement that was heartily agreed with by both of the BBC owners who bought it.

EMULATE IT WITH: MESS or BeebEm • www.rickynet.net/beebem

***Sinistar*: Quick, run for it.**

ROBOTRON (SPECTRUM)
Your mum called it 'Robot Ron'

As with *Sinistar* on the BBC Micro, Atarisoft's behaviour with regard to the Spectrum resembled a drunk man trying to cross a waltzer. The company released some fairly stinky titles, intimidated a few unofficial clone games into becoming licensed Atarisoft releases, and simply never bothered trying to sell by far its two best Speccy conversions, *Moon Patrol* and *Robotron*. *Robotron* in particular was a superb feat of Spectrum coding, retaining practically every feature of the frenzied coin-op right down to the double-joystick control option.

You can tell by the colour clash that Atarisoft 'borrowed' another old Speccy game for this, but at least this time they rewrote it.

Your reporter is particularly proud to note that even the author of Speccy *Robotron* didn't own a copy of his work after Atarisoft binned the project before release, and the game would have been lost to history forever had I not had the foresight to, er, 'borrow' a leaked copy from a sinister contact in Atarisoft back in '87. Not for my own gains I hasten to add – I kept it safely in the loft so that it could be returned to the author over a decade later and enjoyed by keen emulation fans for the rest of time. Well done me.

EMULATE IT WITH: Spectaculator • www.spectaculator.com

MISSING, PRESUMED LOST

THE SEARCH FOR THE SECRET GAMES CONTINUES...

We've barely scratched the surface here, and there are countless other lost games that have been rediscovered through the magic of your PC. However, many of the Holy Grails of gaming's history are still out there somewhere, lost in time. Like the Spectrum version of *Super Mario Brothers* rip-off *Great Giana Sisters*, reviewed by *Crash* magazine but killed before release by some more pesky lawyers. But someone must still have the tape, eh? Rare/Ultimate reportedly had a completed Spectrum version of *Solar Jetman*, the last game in the *Jetman* trilogy, but have never let it see the light of day. Ultra-rare coin-op prototype *Marble Madness 2* still waits for one of its few owners to let the ROMs be dumped for MAME, and ethical wranglings surround the emulation of *Bradley Trainer*, the famous military version of *Battle Zone*. (The MAME team are supposedly uncomfortable about the fact that *Bradley Trainer* never saw an arcade, and therefore see it as inappropriate for their arcade emulator.) If we've learned one thing, though, it's that emulation is as dogged as a Terminator in its pursuit of videogaming posterity. *Marble Madness 2*, *Bradley Trainer* and the rest may be lost to us now. But they'll be back.

R.I.P.

sniper

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UPDATE

Justice at last...

JUDGE DREDD VS JUDGE DEATH

The crime is life, the sentence is death. *Richie Shoemaker* gets off with a caution having given up on life years ago

CV

REBELLION

Its best games have always had the word 'versus' in the title

1994 The *Doom*-style FPS *Aliens Vs Predator* is unleashed for the fated Atari Jaguar and becomes the console's flagship game.

1995 Rebellion is the last to leave the sinking ship after *Chequered Flag* and *Sky Hammer* are released for the Jaguar.

1999 PC owners finally get to experience the fear of *Aliens Vs Predator* on their own machine five years after the original release. Rebellion also releases a PSone port of *Rainbow Six*.

2000 Rebellion buys *2000AD* as well as releasing two distinctly average PC games; *Gunlok* and *The Mummy*.

2001 A movie deal is signed with Shoreline Entertainment for two Judge Dredd movies. Rebellion's first *2000AD* game is announced as *Dredd Vs Death*, powered by the new Asura engine. *Wardog* is introduced to *2000AD* readers, with a game to follow in 2002.

2002 *Rogue Trooper* is announced. NDA Games signs up *Dredd Vs Death*. *2000AD* celebrates 25 years of thrill power.

2003 *Dredd* will be released at cinemas and on PC, probably on consoles and we should know a lot more about Rogue Trooper's first game for a decade.

THE DETAILS

DEVELOPER Rebellion
PUBLISHER NDA Games
WEBSITE www.rebellion.co.uk
OUT Autumn 2003AD

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

- Judge Dredd and Judge Death have been battling for more than 20 years in the pages of *2000AD*, yet this will the first time they have met on PC
- Unique and stylish 3D engine, perfectly suited to 3D comic book action
- A host of popular Mega-City One characters will appear, from Walter The Wobot, to the lovely Judge Anderson and even the misunderstood Fatties
- Enforce the law and send perps to the cubes – or to their deaths

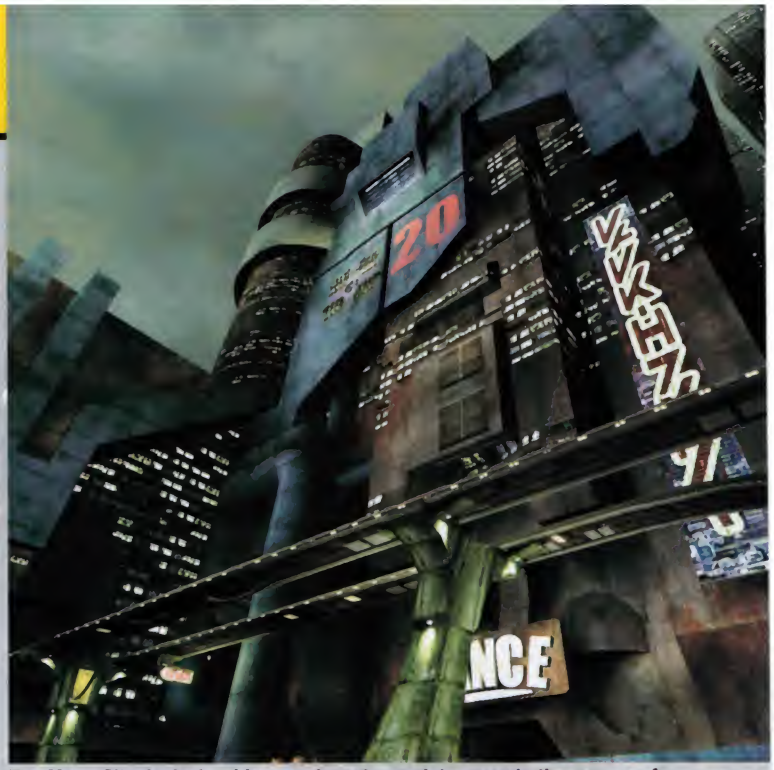
MEGA-CITY ONE is a sprawling metropolis home to 400 million people, every one a potential criminal. In this teeming den of humanity the law is upheld by the Judges, walking justice dispensers with the power to arrest, convict and sentence criminals on the spot. But then Judge Death showed up. With his permanent grimace, cadaverous physique and burlesque Judge's uniform, Death believes life itself is a crime punishable by death.

Judge Dredd, with his granite chin, penchant for violence and hatred of democracy and human rights is the only thing standing between Death and a whole lot of executions. It should be an interesting match-up.

The *Dredd Vs Death* story is an obvious basis for a game, yet it has taken more than two decades to bring one of *2000AD*'s most enduring rivalries to life. Despite a number of attempts at digitising the comic's leading man, few, if any, have done Dredd justice, let alone come anywhere near capturing the vastness of Mega-City One, the diversity of its

"It's only now we could even dream of creating a project as vastly ambitious as this"

JOSE ALLER
SENIOR PRODUCER, NDA GAMES



The Mega-City docks level is one of most complete areas in the game so far.

population, or the whacked-out, harsh insanity of its legal system. Perhaps the technicalities of bringing Mega-City One to life just weren't feasible. Until now.

"It would have been very hard to capture the mood and excitement of a megalopolis teeming with hundreds of millions of people with the computer technology of five years ago, let alone 25 years ago," says Jose Aller, senior producer for NDA Games, the game's publisher. "It's only now we could even dream of creating a project as vastly ambitious as this."

ASURA 'BOUT THAT

The developers of this latest effort are Oxford-based Rebellion, creators of what is still the most relentlessly terrifying game around, *Aliens Vs Predator*. To bring Dredd alive, the team has developed a new 3D engine, dubbed 'Asura'.

Rather than opting for realism, or heading off the other way on to the cel-shading bandwagon, the Asura engine sits perfectly between the two extremes, offering an aesthetic that is gritty and, excuse the pun, graphically novel.

"The idea is to bring Dredd's world to life," says Aller. "If we went for something like the *Quake III* or *Doom III* engine, like in *Medal Of Honor*, the game would look too much like a movie, which isn't what the comics are all about. Similarly, neither is it *Bugs Bunny*. We're not going for the obvious dark and moody *Quake* style, we have to stick to the style of the comics." Now there's a relief.

"The vast metropolis of Mega-City One is essentially the central character in the Judge Dredd stories," continues Aller. "We feel that the city we have realised in the game will blow the minds of gamers and fans of *2000AD*."

The current version of the game has undeniable impact. Few cities have looked as varied, vast or colourful. And with at least another year of development left to run, Rebellion is sure the engine will be able to handle at least 30 high-detail characters on screen at any one time. *Wolfenstein* and *Medal Of Honor* could barely handle half that number.

"Characters and environment are drawn using continuous level of detail techniques," explains Aller. "The more people on screen, the lower the detail they are drawn with. The Asura engine is completely scaleable to the machine it's running on. We've tried hard to maintain a balance of supporting the latest state-of-the-art hardware while still making the game run smoothly on older machines."

ARRESTING DEVELOPMENT

Judge Dredd himself is a step above your traditional FPS hero. He knows how to deliver his trademark Dirty Harry inspired one-liners and use a gun, his trusty Lawgiver. But like all judges, Dredd is both policeman and judiciary so sentencing is sure to play a part. Four hundred million people, all potential 'crazies', inhabit Mega-City One, and with high unemployment, laws are harsh and punishments even harsher. Catch someone firing a gun, for example and not only can you lock them up for illegal possession of a firearm, you can add a few years to the sentence for littering – a year for each shell casing.

"The main difference, between *Dredd Vs Death* and other FPSs is the player will have to deal with the various 'perps' and scumbags that infest the streets according to the letter of the law, which provides a unique gameplay element. Players will be forced to adopt a more

Q&A

JOSE ALLER

A fan of Japanese comics rather than British, senior producer at *Dredd Vs Death* publisher, NDA Games, Jose Aller, has obviously been catching up on what he's missed.

PCZ How would you convince someone who's never heard of *2000AD* that the game will be worth playing?

JOSE As veteran developers of licensed games, we are keenly aware that a high-profile license is just not enough on its own to sell a game to the evermore well-informed gaming community. For that reason, we have done our damndest to make sure that both the gameplay and the unfolding storyline are absolutely engrossing, even to the non-Dredd fan.

PCZ How could you convince someone who's only seen the film that the game is worthy of his or her time?

JOSE All we need to say is that Sylvester Stallone will not be appearing in this game. That should do the trick.

PCZ Apart from the obvious, what is illegal in Mega-City One?

JOSE Sugar (often referred to as 'Snow'), alcohol, caffeine, tobacco (though there are special areas called smokatoriums where you can puff away to your heart's content). You name it, basically – even 20th century comic books are illegal due to their addictiveness, making 'comic running' a dangerous but profitable profession.

PCZ What's with this funny swearing business in *2000AD*? What's wrong with 'drat', 'darn' and 'fkstick'?**

JOSE The cultural maelstrom that is Mega-City One, combined with the various catastrophes that have befallen it over the years, have altered many of the expletives we use today into new and exciting forms, so 'Grud!' means 'God!', while 'Dok!' and 'Drokk!', well – you should be able to use your imagination. And as you may be able to tell from Dredd's vocabulary, swearing is one of the few things that hasn't been made illegal in Mega-City One!

A SHORT HISTORY OF DEATH

THE READERS OF 2000AD HAVE HAD 22 YEARS OF DARK JUSTICE. IT'S TIME WE CAUGHT UP ON THINGS

Readers of *2000AD* were first introduced to Judge Death way back in *2000AD* Prog 149, January 1980.

"*The crime iss life*," he hissed to suspects, "*The sentence iss death*." At which point judgment was swift and brutal, usually involving the removal of internal organs. Dredd tried to take him down the traditional way only to be told, as bullets ripped through Death's putrescent flesh, "*You cannot kill what doess not live*." Quite.

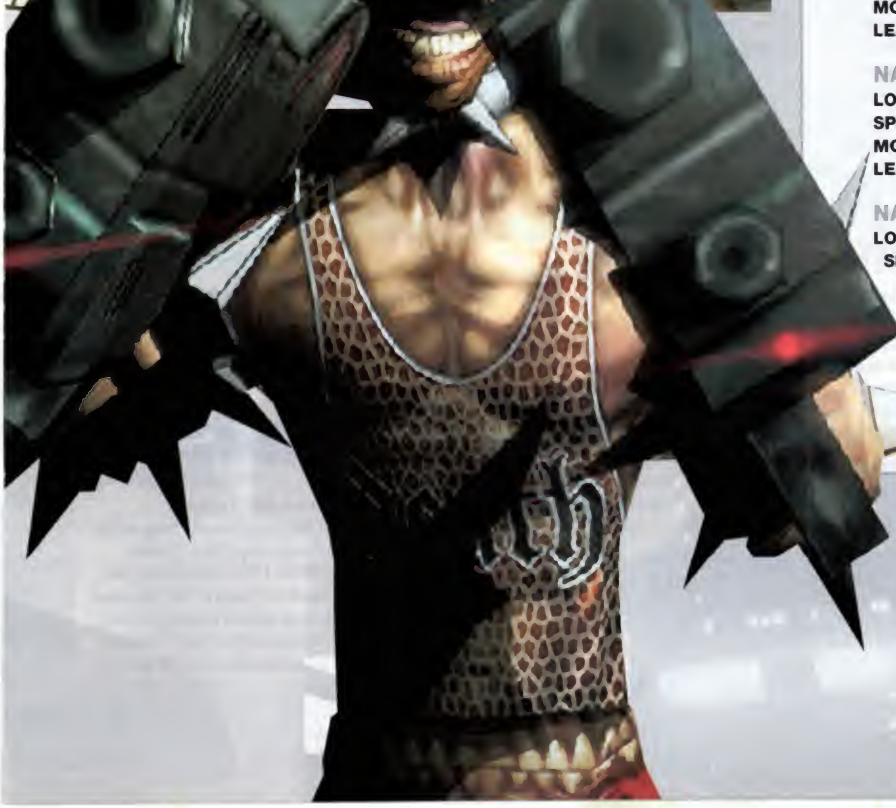
So powerful was the maleficent magistrate that the very blonde Judge Anderson of Psi-Division was drafted in a week later to help Dredd out. Anderson, who was to become another of *2000AD*'s most celebrated characters, saved the day by imprisoning the spirit of Death inside her own body.

Before long, Death's direful buddies turn up to rescue him, Judges Fire, Fear and Mortis, able to burn, scare and putrefy their victims to death respectively. Unable to kill them outright, Dredd and Anderson (the Dempsey and Makepeace of the comic world) end up paying the four of them a visit back home in Deadworld. Although they save the day again, as the old adage goes, you can't cheat death, only fend him off for a while. Hence the many reappearances of Dredd's arch-nemesis, culminating in this here videogame.

Death: the strong arm of the law.

If it wasn't for Anderson, Dredd would be pushing up daisies in Deadworld.

This is what happens when you employ giant spiders as construction workers.



THE DARK JUDGES

FEAR, FIRE, MORTIS AND DEATH IN MEGA CITY ONE

In a dimension parallel to our own, some bright spark had the idea that since all crime is committed by the living, the best way to eradicate it is to kill everyone. Thus the Dark Judges were born. In our world they appear as spirits that possess the bodies of the living to conduct their evil work. Destroy the host body and the spirit will roam the Mega-City, searching for a new host. As well as being immortal, Dark Judges can sense the presence of the living, providing quite a challenge to Dredd, and you, the player. In a 'know your enemy' type affair, here's a brief run-down of what you're up against.

NAME Judge Death
LOOKS LIKE The demon offspring of Reg Hollis and Ally McBeal.
SPECIALITY Plunging his boney digits into the bodes of the living and squeezing their hearts, and *ssaying everything with a double ss*.
MOST LIKELY TO SAY "I have come to judge you..." yada, yada, yada.
LEAST LIKELY TO SAY "She sells seashells on the seashore."

NAME Judge Fire
LOOKS LIKE Dave Woods after one flaming Sambuca too many.
SPECIALITY Steaks. Well done.
MOST LIKELY TO SAY "Anyone for toast?"
LEAST LIKELY TO SAY "Has anyone got a light?"

NAME Judge Mortis
LOOKS LIKE A Minotaur without the meat.
SPECIALITY Like Oil Of Olay in reverse, his touch can add years to you.
MOST LIKELY TO SAY "Call the corpse."
LEAST LIKELY TO SAY "How do you keep your skin so young?"

NAME Judge Fear
LOOKS LIKE One of the knights who say 'Ni'.
SPECIALITY Opening the flaps on his helmet.
MOST LIKELY TO SAY "Gaze into the face of Fear."
LEAST LIKELY TO SAY "Does this lipstick suit me?"

"Blow away a load of civilians and the Special Judicial Squad will be paying you a visit"

JOSE ALLER
SENIOR PRODUCER, NDA GAMES

thoughtful style – though there'll still be plenty of all-out frag-fests."

With Dredd able to invoke laws as wide-ranging and incongruent as littering and headbanging, all the way to assault and mass-murder, quite how dishing out such harsh justice will manifest itself is still to be finalised. But one thing's for sure, players won't be allowed to summarily execute citizens for just getting in the way.

"Blow away a load of civilians," says Aller, "and the SJS – Special Judicial Squad ('The Judges Who Judge Judges') will be paying you a visit."

DEATH BECOMES HIM

All of which shouldn't deflect attention away from the meat of the game – the battle against the Dark Judges. The nature of which is being kept under wraps. Aller goes as far as to say: "The story is taken from the comics and elaborated on to add new twists and bring it up to date." But that's it. Which particular storyline(s) the *Dredd Vs Death* game is based on, we simply don't know.

"We are attempting to make the Dark Judges in the game as faithful to the comic as possible. But whatever abilities they have in the game, we can assure you that Dredd's many previous encounters with the Dark Judges will allow him to deal with them."

But what of Judge Fear, who is so demonstrably ugly he has to hide his facial features behind a mask lest he scare people to death – which is exactly what he is duty-bound to do.

"As the 'face of fear' is capable of causing instant death to anyone who views it, we would have to be careful how it was implemented to avoid decimating the PC-owning population," muses Aller.

"Judge Anderson will have a pivotal role in the game, of course," adds Aller, "turning up at crucial points to assist Dredd with her psychic powers. As everyone knows, his tough exterior and his single-minded approach to upholding the law does not faze her. Dredd's faithful manservant Walter the Wobot and the Fatties will also definitely be making an appearance.

"Mega-City One has a mind-bogglingly diverse population with an incredible range of occupations, lifestyles and appearances, from the seraphically saintly to the deeply deviant, and it has been our challenge to portray the citizens in all their insane technicolour glory. The game will be the crazed cultural melting pot that we know and love from the comics."

GUN LAW

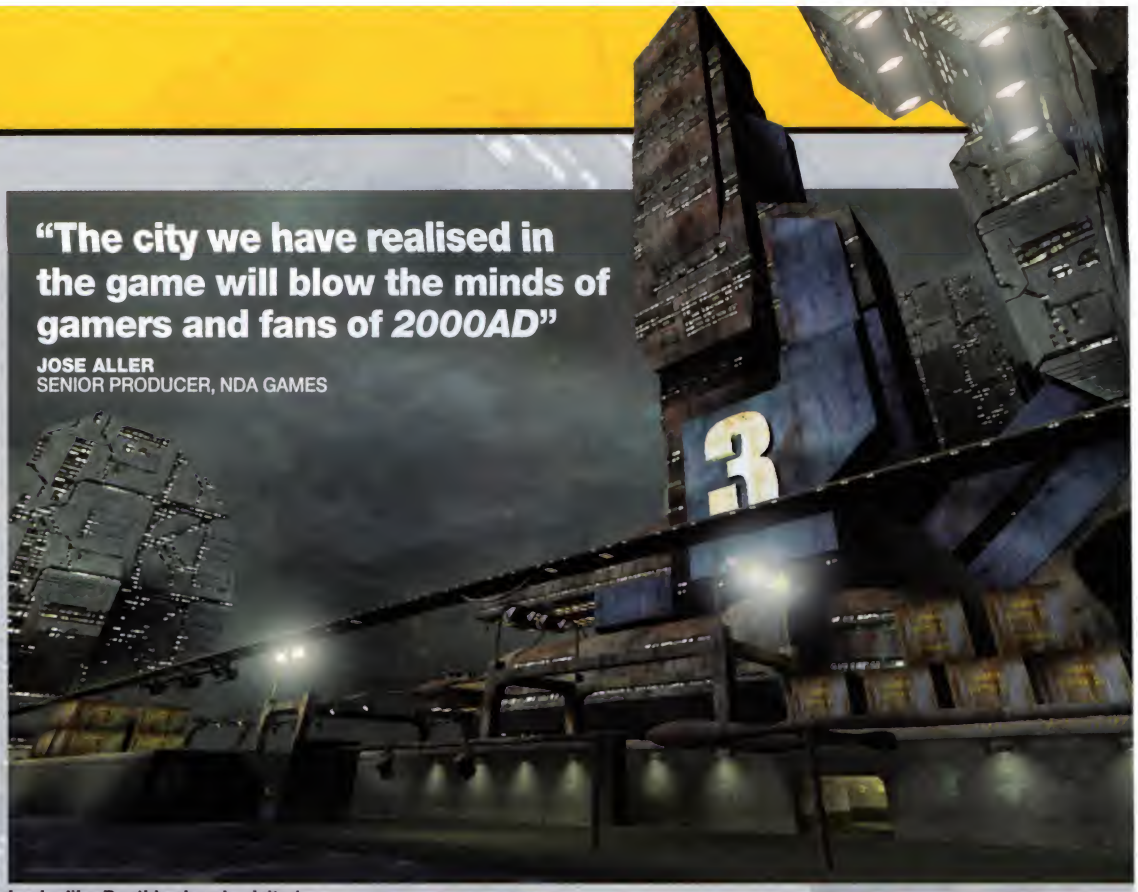
Aiding Dredd in his fight against crime is his trusty Lawgiver pistol, a weapon as important to a Judge as a Lightsaber to a Jedi. Effectively six weapons in one, the Lawgiver in the final game is slated to include various types of ammunition; standard rounds, armour piercing, ricochet, heat-seeking bullets, incendiary and high explosive. Other weapons will be on hand too, such as the Lawrod Rifle. As Aller says: "It's handy for taking out that 50ft mechanoid that's been troubling you – and for when you absolutely, positively need to bust some heads."

As well as a decent-sized arsenal, we can expect Dredd to accumulate a wide variety of inventory items, from the usual keycards and ammo packs, all the way to the many varied and outlandish inventions the Judges take for granted. Expect Cling Nets, Cuffs, and every Judge's friend, the Birdie, a handheld lie detector. Oh, and Boing, a sealant that's the only way to capture Judge Death.

But the biggest item of Dredd's equipment, his Lawmaster bike, looks like it might have to wait for another time. Aller says: "We are creating the best first-person shooter we can by focusing on Dredd interacting with the multitudes of people that inhabit Mega-City One, and the best way to do that was to be wearing

"The city we have realised in the game will blow the minds of gamers and fans of *2000AD*"

JOSE ALLER
SENIOR PRODUCER, NDA GAMES



Looks like Death's already visited.

Deathcult HQ is another area nearing completion.

THEY LIKED IT SO MUCH...

Rebellion's familiarity with the 2000AD universe is what makes them the perfect team to produce a Judge Dredd game. Not only have they been fans of Judge Dredd and his 2000AD colleagues since childhood, but following its 2001 buy-out, Rebellion owns Judge Dredd and the entire 2000AD stable, lock stock and synth-barrel. So not only is it in their own interests to keep *Dredd Vs Death* faithful to the comic (unlike the horrible and best forgotten 1995 Stallone vehicle) but they've had established artists and scriptwriters who've worked on the comic to call on when designing the game. And it shows.

Stallone: a travesty.

"I honestly believe this will be a new beginning for 2000AD in games," says Jose Aller. "Having seen Rebellion and 2000AD I think they work well together. They were made for each other. The guys are under no illusions as to what's ahead, but they have some fantastic ideas and they work quickly. Which is great from a publishers point of view."

out his Justice Department issue boots on the streets arresting perps and trying to survive against a host of enemies."

ON LOCATION

In terms of the missions themselves, Rebellion is currently finalising the 10-12 chapters. Though the game will be linear, we are promised multiple objectives and various ways to arrest perps. As well as saving 400 million people from summary execution, handing out six month stints in the cubes for littering will be required.

As to the locations, the Halls Of justice, the docks and Romero Mega Mall are confirmed. What we've seen is impressive – the skyline extends far into the distance and on the levels set high among the towering scrapers, just looking down is enough to induce computer-generated vertigo. A wry smile meets questions of visiting Deadworld, home of the Dark Judges, or The Cursed Earth, the radioactive wasteland walled outside the city.

JUDGEMATCH

It's difficult to tell at this stage how *Dredd Vs Death* will square up against the likes of *Half-Life* in terms of AI, but both Rebellion and NDA are confident they can take it to the next level.

"Too many games rely on scripted sequences to cover-up bad AI, which means things may look good first time round but soon get very repetitive," points out Aller. "The AIs in *Dredd Vs Death* truly are independent entities – they're aware of their own emotions and surroundings, and consider the consequences of their actions. Rather than use fixed states ('idle', 'suspicious', etc) the AI characters are governed by goal-based fuzzy logic systems, which weigh up the pros and cons of the current situation and react accordingly. Even our basic 'grunt' AI is capable of team-based multiplayer games.

As to the subject of multiplayer, little is forthcoming aside from the fact we are promised a number of unique modes. Questions of 'Judgematch', 'Block Wars' or some sort of city-wide riot scenario are met only with a knowing smile.

"What I can say is that we've got some really nice ideas for multiplayer," admits Aller. "We want to make multiplayer special, more than just deathmatch. We want to make it a really new experience."

Now up to Prog 1300 and costing slightly more than eight pence, *2000AD* has seen Dredd and his nemesis develop to a degree unrivalled in any other comic. We know it's high time justice was done to the nation's favourite future lawman, and we've got a feeling that the Rebellion team are just the ones to mete it out.

2000AD'S MOST WANTED

THE CHARACTERS WE WANT TO SEE ON OUR PCS

Judge Dredd may be the first *2000AD* character out of the blocks, but more will surely follow. Work on a Rogue Trooper game has already begun, and there are countless others from the pages of *2000AD* waiting in the wings. Here are some *2000AD* regulars the *PCZONE* team would like to see arriving on PC before 3000AD.

Strontium Dog: radioactive mutant who can read your mind.

BAD COMPANY

Danny Franks, leader Kano and the rest of Bad Company would be perfectly cast in a sci-fi 3D tactical shooter. The zombie-like alien enemy, the Krool, plus attacks from hallucinogenic chemical weapons would make for a very interesting game. The concept would work equally well with the A.B.C. Warriors.

STRONTIUM DOG

Bounty hunter Johnny Alpha is one of *2000AD*'s oldest cast members. A mutant with eyes capable of reading men's thoughts, he and his kind take on the jobs too dirty for everyone else. A traditional FPS beckons.

SLAINE

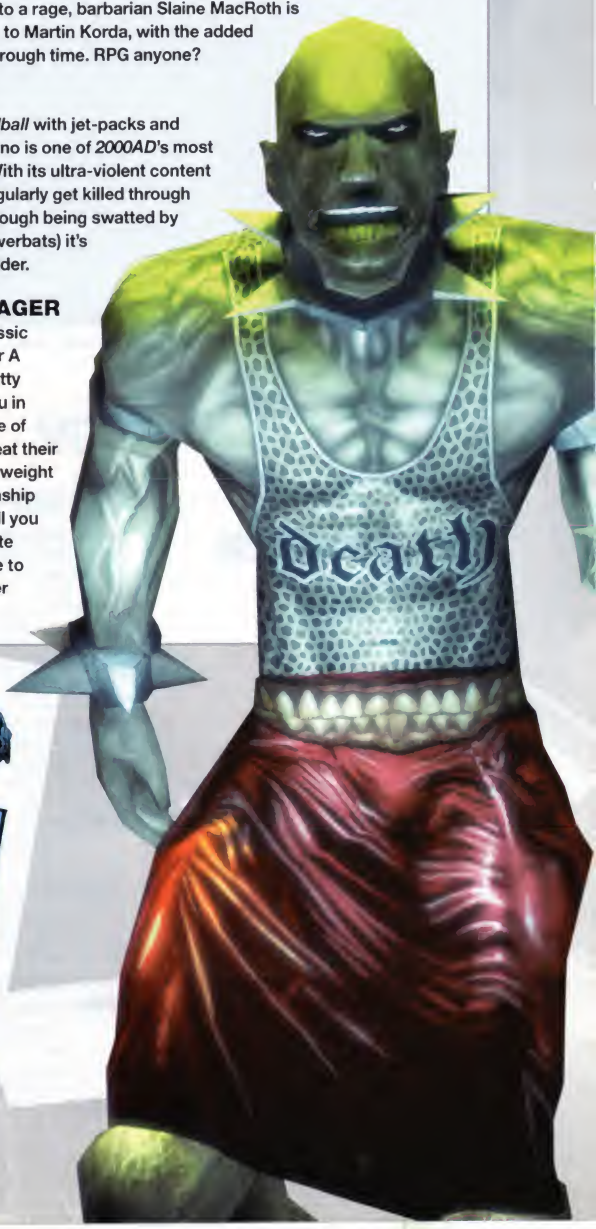
A codpiece fashioned out of a boar's head, an axe called Brainbiter and a tendancy to fly into a rage, barbarian Slaine MacRoth is *2000AD*'s answer to Martin Korda, with the added ability to travel through time. RPG anyone?

INFERNO

Effectively *Speedball* with jet-packs and motorbikes, Inferno is one of *2000AD*'s most famous sports. With its ultra-violent content where players regularly get killed through injury (usually through being swatted by goalkeepers' powerbats) it's perfect game fodder.

FATTY MANAGER

Based on the classic tale 'Requiem For A Heavyweight', Fatty Manager puts you in charge of a stable of Fatties eager to eat their way to the Heavyweight Eating Championship Of The World. Will you use illegal appetite inducers, or hope to win through sheer guts alone?



The walking dead: the way the models move and react in *Doom III* is staggeringly good.

THE DETAILS

DEVELOPER id Software
PUBLISHER Activision
WEBSITE www.idsoftware.com
OUT 2003/when it's ready

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

- Oh come on...
- The best-looking game ever
- Full single-player campaign
- Proper storyline
- Full 5.1 sound support
- Bloody
- Bloody scary

CV

ID SOFTWARE

Most companies would die happy having just one of these games on its headstone. id has got all five.

1993 If you were alive and owned a PC, you played *Doom*. It was lightyears ahead of what had gone before and revolutionised the gaming world, as well as changing our lives forever.

1994 The inevitable sequel didn't disappoint anyone. *Doom II* dished up more of the same and was even better than the original – something we didn't think was possible.

1996 It wasn't the first true 3D FPS but *Quake* was one of the best. Very brown but still very good, especially the multiplayer part.

1997 Home to one of the best deathmatch levels ever, namely Q2DM1. *Quake II* turned lunch hours into frag-fests in offices the world over. It was a multiplayer dream, even if it was still brown.

1999 Ditched the pretence of being a single-player game and created the best and the purest deathmatch tool known to man. *Quake III Arena* hails from the last millennium, but we still play it to this day.

Hey, good-looking... DOOM III

Most people would travel to hell and back to see *Doom III* code. *Dave Woods* went to Dublin

BEFORE I wrested control of my life away from my parents I was regularly subjected to acts of barbarity. "If you don't finish your greens, you won't get any ice cream," was the sort of abuse that was dished out on a daily basis – and they wonder why teens end up hating the world. Ever since I moved out into my luxury bedsit I vowed that I'd stand up for myself and never let people take the piss again – something I managed pretty successfully until a recent Activision press event.

Called over to Dublin on the promise of free food and wine, I arrived at an extremely posh hotel to be faced with an itinerary that read like a convention for console fetishists. Right down at the bottom at 6pm, sandwiched between dinner and some Xbox muck, was the titbit I was after: a new *Doom III* presentation and the chance to interview top bods Tim Willits (designer on *Doom III*), and Todd Hollenshead (CEO), from id Software.

Looking back it was a pretty canny tactic because if I'd seen *Doom III* first I wouldn't have been interested in anything else. It looks that good. You know it looks that good because we started banging on about it after E3 and you've seen the screenshots. But in the two months between E3 and Activate 2002, I'd forgotten just how good. When Tim Willits fired up the demo and transported us back into the bowels of hell, I was as

See the plaque on that Marine's teeth? See the hairs in that scientist's ear? What do you mean you don't? Get a better graphics card!

gobsmacked as I was the first time around. You might not have seen the video yet, and you might not believe that the game's going to look as good as these screenshots – but it does. It's time to believe the hype – *Doom III* is the next big thing.

"*Doom III* is not about rolling landscapes. It's more an intense atmospheric experience"

TODD HOLLENSHEAD
CEO, ID SOFTWARE

IT'S A KINDA MAGIC

And this time around we weren't just watching a static presentation. Sick of people (mainly the sort that populate chat forums on the Internet when they should be drinking in the real world) saying the game isn't going to look or play like the video, Tim and Todd have come armed with code this time around and they're ready to unleash it. Well almost.

"The most important thing to mention at this point is that everything you see from this moment on, as of right now, is all being rendered in real time in the engine on that cream-coloured box right over there." And after a quick prodding Todd lets slip the fact that the cream-coloured box contains a GeForce 4. A card that's going to be available for very little money when the game finally ships in 2003. And that's if you want to play the game with full detail. Apparently the game will play with most detail turned off on a first-generation GeForce card.

With that, Tim Willits double-clicks on the *Doom III* icon and fires the action up. Moving around the dark, dank corridors he drops a couple of demons in to show off the ultra-realistic character animations. "In most games, characters

TWO'S COMPANY

IT MIGHT BE A SINGLE-PLAYER GAME FIRST AND FOREMOST BUT *DOOM III* WILL SHIP WITH MULTIPLAYER COMPONENTS

Scare the shit out of your mates, without leaving your bedroom.

id may be synonymous with superlative 3D engines and deathmatching, but *Doom III* is focusing on slow atmospheric pacing. But there are still going to be multiplayer options, right Todd? "You can expect simple deathmatch. Simple but fun, that's what we're going for."

But surely the slow pace of the game is going to lead to a different sort of deathmatch?

"Obviously with the lighting and things like that you have the scope for a creepy sneak-up-behind-you multiplayer experience. However at this point we haven't really started developing that, so how it's going to work exactly would be speculation."

Do you know how many players it's going to support?

"It will support at least two. Heh."

Thanks Todd.

You think it looks frightening now, wait till you see it moving.

are just like boxes," says Tim, "but not in *Doom III*."

Shooting a folically challenged and overweight bit of undead hellspawn, he shows how it reacts as your body would if you'd just been shot between the legs with a shotgun. I'm not talking OTT *Soldier Of Fortune*-style dismemberments, but more subtle movements in the body and physical feedback that looks and feels real. You know how bodies in shooters act like they've been poked by David Copperfield? Like when you shoot someone at the top of a flight of stairs and they just float horizontally, held up by their toes, waiting for Debbie McGee to come and point at them in a dramatic fashion? Don't expect to see that in *Doom III*. In *Doom III* the body will crumple, slide off the stairs, pick up momentum and crash to the bottom where a limb might fold up behind the back. Or it might get wedged halfway down. Think realism.

THE REAL THING

And this realism extends to objects in the world as well, which is a first for id. In previous games, they didn't bother with making the environments interactive. You wouldn't want to push a barrel around in *Quake III* for example, because you'd just get yourself shot. With *Doom III* however, it's a different story: it's slower, it's single-player and it's going to involve thinking laterally to get yourself through certain situations.

Most of what we've seen of the game so far is set in dark claustrophobic corridors deep in the bowels of Mars, and Todd Hollenshead points out that that's exactly where they want it to stay. "As far as rolling hills and landscapes, that's not what *Doom III* is about. It's more an intense atmospheric experience." And, where *Doom* and *Doom II* impressed you with the sheer number of creatures on screen at any one time, the new philosophy is very different.

"We're not going to try to overwhelm you with lots of stupid monsters," says Todd. "We're not going for 1,000 imps coming at you at once. They're going to be smarter and scary in their own right, as opposed to scary just because there's loads of them."

The less is more approach applies to the new engine as well. In the past, engines were judged on the number of polygons they could throw around – the more polys, the more detail, and the better the end result – something which led to European journalists asking the same question: "Und, how many polys are in zis scene?"

In *Doom III* the emphasis isn't on polys but image fidelity, through the use of multiple texture maps. Stripping the engine down to wireframe mode, Tim Willits shows how a typical *Doom III* scene is constructed from basic geometry and multiple texture maps. "You take a plain piece of geometry and make it look like it's rusted or corroded or that it has depth and texture, as opposed to doing that with real polygons." It's the sort of stuff we've been banging on about in the Hardware section, but it's the first time we've seen the power of the new graphics chipsets in action. Todd Hollenshead elaborates even further: "It's the same with the characters as well. They appear to your eye as if they're 200 or 300,000 polygons but they're really 2,500 to 3,000.

FEAR FACTOR

And this is what id has always done best. The coders they've got working in their offices are acknowledged as the best in the business, but what about the stuff that's not as quantifiable? What about the fear factor? How do they test something as ephemeral as that? Todd Hollenshead looks pleased: "We turn the lights off in our offices and play the game. If we have to go home and change pants then we know it's scary enough." Tim Willits sounds even more confident. "It's not that hard, it's just like making a scary movie." With full six-channel 5.1 Dolby Digital audio (with real-time in-engine mixing as opposed to a soundtrack that doesn't take account of the action in-game), the promise of a proper storyline, the aforementioned visuals and id's heritage – who'd bet against them? PCZ

"We're not going to try to overwhelm you with lots of stupid monsters"

TODD HOLLENSHEAD CEO, ID SOFTWARE

The emphasis is not on quantity of monsters, but on shit-scary quality.

TINSELTOWN

SYLVESTER STALLONE IN 'DOOM: THE MOVIE'? NOT IF TODD HOLLENSHEAD HAS ANYTHING TO DO WITH IT...

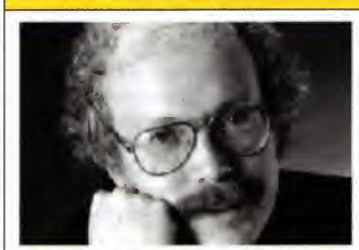
Good games haven't always made good films. In fact come to think of it, bad games haven't always made good films either. Nice arse though.

Despite the flops and failures, Hollywood won't give up on the idea of converting games into films, and if there's one franchise that would surely make the transition it's *Doom*. There's been speculation about a *Doom* movie before but nothing ever materialised. So come on Todd, spill the beans. Is there going to be a movie or not?

"After the reception we got at E3 there's been a lot of media interest in Hollywood to talk to us about the film rights, and we're having discussions along those lines. From our standpoint we'd love to see a really good *Doom* movie but we really don't want to see a not-so-good *Doom* movie. If they're not going to do a good job we're not interested. We don't need to make movies of our games to be successful."

Fighting talk and one that will hopefully result in the first properly excellent game/film conversion. We're quite happy to be considered as extras for the spawn-of-hell roles. Some of us wouldn't even need a makeover.

MORNING GLORY



"I'm a storyteller and my story must be told..."

YOU CAN'T HAVE A TRULY GREAT SINGLE-PLAYER GAME WITHOUT A DECENT STORY. ID SEEMS TO AGREE...

***Doom III* looks brilliant. Period. But in reality its success as a complete game is going to hinge on the way it plays and the atmosphere that id manages to shoehorn in. As a full-on single-player experience, id appreciates that narrative is crucial, and rather than muddle through themselves they've taken on the services of Matt Costello to help pen the script. Details are pretty scarce, at the moment, but Costello does seem a good choice. He has a rich heritage that includes the original storylines for *The 7th Guest* and *11th Hour* games, along with novels *Darkborn*, *The Wizard of Tizare* and *Homecoming*, which was nominated as Best Novel of 1992 by The Horror Writers of America.**

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WORLD CYBER GAMES

http://wcg.vga.org.uk

Main Event

Event Name:	Samsung World Cyber Games
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Event Website:	http://wcg.vga.org.uk
Registration:	Register at http://wcg.vga.org.uk to guarantee a place in the competition!
Date:	3-6 October 2002
Venue:	Stuff Live 2002, held at Earls Court, London
Cost of entry:	£10 in advance, £13 on the door for full entry to Stuff Live 2002 on all four days, including the Samsung World Cyber Games
Games being played:	Counter-Strike, Quake 3 Arena, Unreal Tournament, Fifa 2002, Age of Kings, X-Box Halo.
Travel:	Coaches are being laid on from VGA centres across the country to get to Earls Court in the morning and return in the evening. Check the website for more details.

Schedule

Thursday 3 October:	X-Box Halo and Unreal Tournament competitions
Friday 4 October:	Age of Kings and Quake 3: Arena
Saturday 5 October:	Counter-Strike Qualification and Fifa 2002
Sunday 6 October:	Counter-Strike Finals

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Fire's a powerful weapon against slow units like these heavily armoured knights.

Each opponent you'll face has a radically different construction style.

THE DETAILS

DEVELOPER Firefly Studios
PUBLISHER Take 2 Interactive
WEBSITE www.stronghold-game.com
OUT September 30 2002

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

- *Stronghold* part two
- 50 mission skirmish mode
- 20 mission campaign divided into four acts
- Desert environment with eight new troop units

Sand castles

STRONGHOLD: CRUSADER

***Stronghold* goes on holiday. *Rhianna Pratchett* brings the suntan lotion**

I ONCE correctly identified that a *PCZ* caller was playing *Stronghold* by hearing the gentle mooing of cows in the background. This told me a) I'd been playing the game for far too long, b) so had he, and c) that it was all the little details that made *Stronghold* such an entertaining RTS. A bacon sandwich RTS, as I like to call them – one that isn't overburdened by micromanagement, allowing you you take time to sit back and munch your plate of bacon sarnies. And perhaps drink a pot of tea.

Stronghold: Crusader, on the other hand, is more of a Pot Noodle RTS, requiring more consistent attention and non-greasy fingers, as it revolves around multiple opponents and frantic skirmish gameplay. "We always wanted to do an awesome skirmish game," explains Simon Bradbury, director at Firefly Studios. "But as back in 1998 we wanted to do a really good castle sim game to come out in 2001, we couldn't do the skirmish side as well because it would have taken an extra year of work and budgeting. So we thought we'd try and do *Stronghold* in two parts, and *Crusader* is effectively part two."

"I beseech thee Lord that you grant me that heretic Saladin's extensive hareem."

THE SECOND COMING

And part two is the best description for it, because *Crusader* is much more than an expansion, yet doesn't add quite enough to qualify as a new game altogether. Graphically, and to a large extent in its economic system, it's the same as its predecessor, but in this case the action takes place in the harsh Syrian deserts on the path of the Crusades rather than on the green fields of home.

Twenty missions divided into four chapters make up the campaign mode, which allows you to play as both the European and Arabian sides, as well as teaching you to master the sneaky yet vulnerable new Arabic units. But it's the skirmish options that make up the real meat of the game with a 50-mission 'skirmish trail' where you play through increasingly difficult scenarios, forming alliances and defeating multiple enemies along the way.

Although you'll be using many of the same economic units, the desert environment means that fertile land suitable for farming is pretty scarce and controlling the oases – where the best land is found – is essential for mounting a successful campaign. Fire is also an ever-present danger, as well as being a primary weapon of the Arabian forces.

"*Crusader* combines glorious depictions of medieval life with full-on, slap-in-the-face strategy"

EASTERN PROMISE

Previously, skirmish mode has been something of an afterthought with strategy titles, frequently tagged onto the end of a game as an optional extra. *Stronghold: Crusader* looks like it's going to redress the balance, and produce a game that thrives on epic battles with multiple-opponents. Whereas the first *Stronghold* title might have seemed too much of a sim/building game for hardcore strategists, *Stronghold: Crusader* combines glorious depictions of medieval life with full-on, slap-in-the-face strategy. It's not just about pretty Lego castles. This time it's war.

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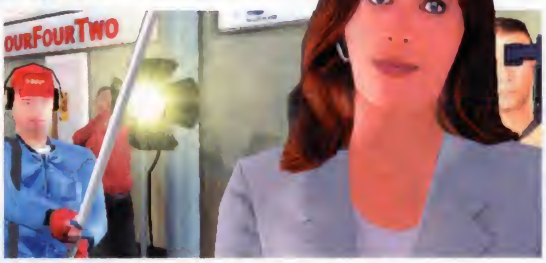
Match action, with Seaman actually making a save.

"The smell of men together, the scent of cat's musk..."



Well, she's better-looking than Garth Crooks.

The Gabby and Tel show

FOURFOURTWO: TOUCHLINE PASSION

THE DETAILS

DEVELOPER Bubball
PUBLISHER SCi
WEBSITE www.sci.co.uk
OUT September 2002

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

- Endorsed by football's finest magazine
- Features Terry Venables' Top 20 all-time teams
- Gabby Logan's in it
- You can shout at your players

A football game named after a football magazine named after a football formation? *Steve Hill* is left back in the office. No groans please

FOOTBALL magazines come and go, but over the last eight years *FourFourTwo* has consistently offered an intelligent insight into the national sport, remaining at the top of the league through a combination of dramatic photography and quality journalism. And that's got nothing to do with the fact that I write for it.

Yep, when I'm not boring you lot with my largely objectionable views on the world of games, I am occasionally to be found on another shelf banging on about the minutiae of football. So, imagine my surprise on learning that *FourFourTwo* is to be made into a PC game.

It's certainly a unique concept – the game of the magazine – but in real terms it's little more than a shrewd marketing exercise, and an attempt to lure unsuspecting readers into the wonderful and frightening world of PC football management. That world is of course dominated by the peerless *Championship Manager*, and much of the press material for *FourFourTwo* would appear to be little more than a thinly veiled dig at it, with cheap jibes about spreadsheets, and an invitation to become 'a footballing managing legend not a statistician.' By all means try and come up with some new ideas, but don't bite the hand that feeds the football management genre.

Junior product manager Ray Livingstone is at least gracious enough to concede: "We wouldn't want to go head to head against *Championship Manager* because, you know, we'd lose, quite frankly. *Championship Manager* is *Championship Manager* and it's the best at what it does. We're trying to do something else, and we think we're going to be the best at what we do."

SHOW US SOMETHING NEW

What they're going to do involves the option to view games via a 3D engine. As Ray says: "Instead of watching a screen where you've got a load of statistics, you actually watch the game. If you think your left back is having a bad game – say he's given the ball away three times and got skinned and was out of position for the goal – then you take him off. So that's why we think our game's going to be more like genuine football management."

As is the wont of modern managers, you can also bellow instructions from the touchline, with the option to tell individual players to tackle, pass, cross, or shoot. You'll even be subjected to press conferences, with your response affecting the opinions of the fans, players and board. And tactics-wise, set pieces can be planned beforehand and employed within the match, something that was touched upon in *UEFA Manager 2000* by the same developer.

"Instead of watching a screen where you've got a load of statistics, you actually watch the game"

RAY LIVINGSTONE
JUNIOR PRODUCT MANAGER

FourFourTwo: Touchline Passion is due out in September, or at least some time before *Championship Manager 4*.

They can shove it.

Building bigger and more impressive temples is sure to garner favour with your chosen deity.

Fancy a nip. I mean dip.

Stone me, it's...

AGE OF MYTHOLOGY

THE DETAILS

DEVELOPER Ensemble Studios
PUBLISHER Microsoft
WEBSITE www.ensemblestudios.com
OUT September 2002

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

- From the people who brought you *Age Of Empires* and *Age Of Kings*
- Looks bloody spectacular
- Has got mythological creatures and gods in it
- Could be a multiplayer phenomenon

***Keith Pullin* clashes with Ensemble Studios' new RTS titan**

THERE WAS A time not too long ago when the thought of *Age Of Mythology* from Ensemble Studios would spin us into a delighted whirlwind of anticipation. But times are changing. Don't get us wrong. We're excited all right, but we're under no illusions...

Black Cactus (*Warrior Kings*) and Creative Assembly (*Shogun*) have proved that Ensemble Studios can no longer take their status as unassailable kings of RTS for granted. The age of empires and kings has been ousted by an era of warriors, shoguns and the odd Cossack or two.

CV ENSEMBLE STUDIOS

ENSEMBLE STUDIOS

We know what Ensemble is famous for and here's how it came about

1998 *Age Of Empires* wins virtually every strategy award going. The subsequent add-on pack *Rise of Rome* wins a few more trophies and cements the game's legendary status.

1999 *Age Of Empires 2: Age Of Kings* improves things further. Many people see *AoE2* as the last great 2D-strategy game.

2000 *AoE2: Conquerors* add-on pack is released. More quality, more fun.

2001 *Age Of Mythology* is announced as Ensemble Studios' first ever 3D strategy game.

It's an interesting predicament for the former sultans of strategy. On one hand expectation is not as high as with *AoE2: Age Of Kings*. On the other hand the company knows that *Age Of Mythology* is its trump card in reclaiming the RTS crown. And make no mistake, Ensemble Studios wants that number one spot back. By the gods, it's even prepared to go 3D.

MYTH AND HYPE

AoM's BANG! engine propels Ensemble Studios into the 21st century with consummate style. The gorgeous environment features lifelike rolling landscapes and oceans, realistic sunlight, and lush, living forests. The fluid animation even gives *Battle Realms* a run for its money.

Yep, *AoM* will require a slight perspective adjustment for *AoK* fans, and we say *AoK* fans because there's no doubting the inspiration behind this new baby. *AoM* is literally *AoK* with divine intervention and 3D Medusas. And why the hell not? The only real reason *AoK* was surpassed in the first place was because technology moved on.

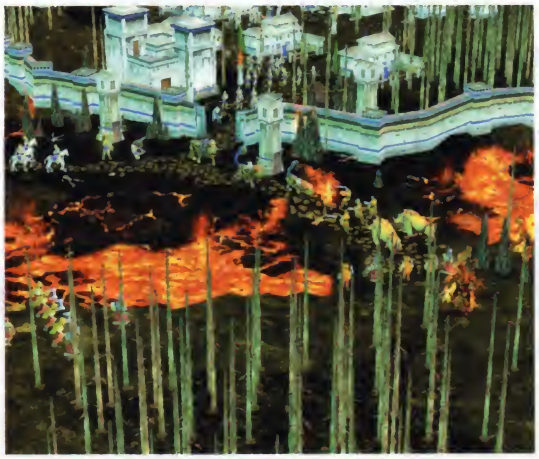
GOD ALMIGHTY

And so the 'build an empire from nothing' gameplay mechanics for *AoM* are wholly familiar. There are nine civilisations to choose from, with three each in the Greek, Norse and Egyptian cultures. Each of these civilisations features mythological gods and creatures. So, expect epic confrontations with armies led by Minotaurs and other monstrosities. Luckily, divine assistance is at hand from gods such as Ra, Isis, Thor, Odin, Zeus and Poseidon. Players can harness their powers, smiting enemies with meteor storms, volcanoes, lightning strikes and floods.

These godly shenanigans are all accompanied by glorious special effects. The approach of a tornado is particularly impressive: the world darkens as the sun is eclipsed by swirling wind and then the deadly funnel appears and carves its way through the land. Ah, the power of the immortals! Ah, the power of GeForce! It's all very satisfying indeed.

DESIGN AWARDS

AoM definitely has an explosive vibe about it – and it's clear that the developers are concentrating on keeping all 36 single-player scenarios as spectacular as possible. The range of locations and set-pieces include the siege at Troy, the pyramids in Egypt and a sprawling mythological underworld. Oh, and if you're interested, the people behind this inspired level design received the 2000 Academy of Interactive Arts and Sciences award for story and character development. And yes, there is a huge multiplayer emphasis too, as well as a level editor that comes with the game.



The different cultures are more recognisable than in other games.

For all its new features. ***AoM*** will still revolve around resource gathering.

"It's got the looks, it's got the power and it's got the gameplay heritage that screams quality"

So, we have a talented team of designers here, the question is can they make gathering berries and raising massive armies as exciting as the rest of the game? Well, obviously it's going to be tricky, but one thing Ensemble can do better than most is portray the mundane in a surprising compelling way.

Hopefully establishing profitable trade routes with other tribes and expanding your little settlements into technologically advanced civilisations will be another area that benefits from the loving touch of an award-winning level design team.

And talking of advanced civilisations; there are a total of four ages to progress through regardless of your culture, and like *AoK* there's a massive technology tree to explore. Players even get to chose different ways to advance though the ages to create unique civilisation bonuses.

GOD ONLY KNOWS

From what we've seen, *Age Of Mythology* may just possess everything you could possibly want in an RTS game. It's got the looks, it's got the power and it's got gameplay heritage that simply screams quality. But like we said, it's going up against some damn fine competition. *Warrior Kings* and *Shogun* will not just stand aside. So, what's it to be? Gaming obscurity or immortality? In the end only God knows.

CULTURE CLUB

THREE DIFFERENT CULTURES MEAN PLENTY OF HAUGHTY GODS, DEVASTATING POWERS AND SCARY MYTHOLOGICAL BEASTS. AND YOU THOUGHT THIS WAS JUST STUFF YOU STUDIED AT SCHOOL

Egyptian
The three primary Egyptian gods are Ra, god of the sun; Isis, goddess of queens and magic; and Set, god of evil. Shifting sands and tornados would be a typical divine power for these immortals, and mythological units would include the Wedjat (basically a winged cobra), giant Scarab and the Avenger.

Norse
The three Norse gods are Odin, ruler of the gods; his son Thor, god of thunder; and Loki, the trickster. A player with Thor as their major deity could paralyse their enemies with frost attacks as well as cause havoc with mythological beasts like Trolls and Frost Giants. The Kraken, scourge of the high seas will also surface.

Greek
Zeus, king of the gods, and his two brothers – Poseidon, god of the sea and Hades, god of the underworld – are the Greek immortals. Players with Zeus on their side can call upon the power of the lightning bolt as well as summon everyone's favourite legendary critters such as Medusa and the Minotaur.

Q&A

GREG T STREET

The award-winning designer and ex-oceanographer gets deep with *ZONE*...

PCZ Why was the whole subject of mythology chosen?
GTS When we finished *Age Of Kings*, a lot of fans just expected us to do the next era in history. However, we also knew that we needed to get another franchise out there so that people wouldn't just come to expect the same game out of Ensemble Studios every time. We figured mythology would allow us to explore new territory without moving too far away from the kind of games our fans expect.

PCZ So, is this *Clash Of The Titans* on the PC, but with better special effects?
GTS Actually, that's not a bad way to describe it. *Age Of Mythology* does have Norse Krakens attacking Greek cities and other mixing of the various myths just like the movie did (Pegasus and Perseus came from two different myths). On the other hand, we don't have mechanical owls, our Olympians don't overact as much, and we lack Harry Hamlin.

PCZ Which mythological beast would you be, and why?
GTS I would have to pick the Centaur, because in mythology they were always crashing parties and drinking all the wine. You would figure that something with the metabolism of a horse would be able to hold their liquor better.

Terror has no hiding place...

DELTA FORCE: BLACK HAWK DOWN

Leave no man behind. Unless they're the likes of *Anthony Holden*

THE DETAILS

DEVELOPER Novalogic
PUBLISHER Novalogic
WEBSITE www.novalogic.com/games/DFBHD
OUT October 25

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

- It's the best-looking *Delta Force* game so far
- All your favourite spec ops gubbins are present and correct
- Huge levels suggest more brilliant *Delta Force* multiplayer action
- Based on real events in Somalia

CV NOVALOGIC

NOVALOGIC

Boasting 17 years of development experience, Novalogic has created and published all manner of games, but flight and military action sims are its bread and butter, led by the flagship *Delta Force* franchise.

1985 Novalogic is formed, and spends around seven years doing home conversions of arcade games.

1992 Helicopter sim *Comanche: Maximum Overkill* is released, showcasing Novalogic's new Voxel engine, then considered cutting edge. Voxels later go out of favour.

1998 The original *Delta Force*, a squad-based shooter, is released to critical acclaim. A sequel follows in 1999.

2001 The *Delta Force* series takes a slight dip with the release of *Delta Force: Land Warrior*. Despite bringing military-level simulation to the home user it fails to live up to the likes of *Counter-Strike* but still manages to amass a loyal online following.

CONSUMERS want conflict. They want violence and war, rivers of blood and viscera, and they want it in a form they can identify with. Nothing too close to home, mind, but give them a real-life conflict in a far flung nation and they're as happy as a dog with two dicks. Now that all the big wars have pretty much been covered though, the demand for new conflicts is effectively outstripping the supply, and we seem to be getting the film and the game of the war before the fighting stops. *Delta Force: Task Force Dagger*'s Afghan setting (see page 84). *Behind Enemy Lines* hitting the cinema screens when the dust had barely settled in Kosova – it's getting to the stage where US presidents have to start wars just to appease the appetite for new consumer products (and don't be surprised when the *Operation Enduring Freedom* RTS comes along in a year or two either).

Of course all this is fine news for us gamers, as there's only so many ways you can kill a roomful of Nazis. We still get to shoot things in the head, but the change of scenery is always nice.

This time we're off to Mogadishu, Somalia, with our good friends the Delta Force, the eponymous heroes of Novalogic's long-running tactical action series. And needless to say, it's not going to be any summer holiday.

Confusingly, *Delta Force: Black Hawk Down* is not based on the film or the book of almost the same name, or even the incident in which the Black Hawk went down (see boxout: Massacre in Mogadishu). Neither is it, as we had

***Delta Force* has come a long way since the Voxel years.**

originally hoped, the long-awaited collaboration between hairy-chinned action has-been Chuck 'The Ginger Ninja' Norris and homegrown cinematic visionary Ridley Scott, in which Chuck returns to Somalia to rescue captured American GIs from illegal POW camps. Instead, the game takes the far more sensible route of recreating, as closely as possible, the events that took place in Somalia circa 1993, content with only visual reference to the film. And a whole lot less blood.

GOOD GUYS WEAR BLACK

More importantly, it all looks rather good. While previous *Delta Force* games, much like the films of Chuck Norris, have always had something to recommend them, they were never exactly works of art. In fact, they often looked nasty, and were saved only by their addictive multiplayer modes, working hand in hand with the excellent NovaWorld Internet servers.

Black Hawk Down, on the other hand, the first significant *Delta Force* game since *Land Warrior*, is a visually striking piece of software. It's being built on a modified *Comanche 4* engine, which has adapted remarkably well to powering a first/third-person shooter. The environments are expansive and detailed, the action transitioning smoothly between indoor and outdoor settings. Characters move convincingly around the terrain, and scripted and real-time events mesh seamlessly to create the illusion of battlefield chaos. It's a far cry from the drab days of *Land Warrior*, that's for sure.

Most striking of all, the levels are simply huge, promising to take the trademark multiplayer action to even greater heights. And you better believe the team is working on some serious multiplayer options, with co-operative play, team deathmatch and free-for-all modes already confirmed.

Better still, the engine's chopper-sim background is set to produce some top-

"The environments are expansive and detailed, the action transitioning smoothly between outdoor and indoor settings"

MASSACRE IN MOGADISHU

THE DAY UNCLE SAM GOT HIS FINGERS BURNT

Maybe if they'd spent a bit less time pole-vaulting...

For those with a short memory for US incursions into Islamic nations, Mogadishu, Somalia was the setting for Operation Restore Hope, the disastrous 1993 skirmish in which the US got into all sorts of trouble trying to put down the brutal local warlords. One of the bloodiest clashes of this messy conflict was later chronicled in the book and subsequent film *Black Hawk Down*, both of which deal, with varying degrees of artistic licence, with the crash-landing of a US Black Hawk helicopter in a Mogadishu marketplace. The US forces were vastly outnumbered and outgunned, and many of them didn't make it out alive.

Of course, *Delta Force: Black Hawk Down* is not licensed from the film or book, and simply shares the same historical setting. It's a bit of a cheeky move by Novalogic to piggyback the success of the film in this way, and quite how they're getting away with it we're not sure (but good luck to 'em). In any case, it's a good thing that the game is not based purely on the film, as it would be a rather frustrating and futile experience.

Q&A

WES ECKHART

Delta Force veteran and producer on *Black Hawk Down*, Wes Eckhart, switches to burst fire and systematically puts our worries to rest.

PCZ Can you describe the variety of missions we'll be facing in *Black Hawk Down*?

WES The game will run the gamut of missions performed by the friendly forces in Somalia, including tracking down and destroying enemy weapon shipments, safeguarding delivery of food and UN relief supplies, destroying communication elements and capturing enemy leaders.

PCZ What new weapons and gadgets can we expect?

WES As we're basing the game on real events, we want to make the weapons selection as realistic as possible. Two of the new weapons are the CAR-15 with Aimpoint sight and the M-21 sniper rifle.

PCZ How about vehicles?

WES On the ground, players will have access to Humvees. A significant part of the game will be spent manning the .50 cal on the back of the Humvee and protecting convoys. In the air, players will approach their targets in Black Hawk and MH-6 Little Bird helicopters. The Black Hawks can transport a fairly large group of friendlies into an area. During the flight, players will be able to use mounted mini-guns to take out enemy vehicles.

PCZ What new multiplayer features are you working on?

WES We're exploring how much vehicle control we can give to players. We would ideally like to have players drive Humvees and trucks in multiplayer, and maybe fly Little Birds. It remains to be seen if the latter will make it into the game.

PCZ Do you have to be careful with the way you depict real life conflicts?

WES You definitely have to be sensitive. With all of our games, we try to walk the line between having a fun, exciting game, and not being exploitive. While we have based missions in the past on possible real world missions, we were always mindful of who our enemies were and what their motivations were. That being said, *Black Hawk Down* is based on a real event. While we want to depict the types of missions US Forces participated in in Somalia, we won't be portraying hordes of civilians, bad guys using women and children as shields, or bodies being dragged through the streets.

PCZ What do you think of *Counter-Strike*, and do you think you can wrestle back a bit of its market?

WES *Counter-Strike*'s a killer game for short scenarios. It specialises in quick (less than 5 minute) scenarios. We're a bit different as our missions and the environments tend to be a lot bigger. The battles tend to evolve over 20-30 minutes, where the teams trade control of the map. I think there's room for both styles of multiplayer gameplay.

notch vehicular action, with both airborne and ground vehicles available through the course of the 20 missions. These are set to include attack choppers, humvees and maybe more, though as no vehicles had been implemented last time we played the game, it's hard to see the developers expanding much on this list (it's due to ship in October). How the addition of vehicles will figure into multiplayer is yet to be seen, but it certainly suggests some interesting possibilities (humvees vs technicals, anyone?).

DOMINANCE AND SUBMISSION

The upshot of all this is that while *Black Hawk Down* is still very much a *Delta Force* game at heart, it's a far more complete and accomplished example than any before it. As if we were in any doubt of this, we played through a couple of the game's 20 missions with Novalogic producer Ed Gwynn, who was keen to impress upon us the amount of variety and complexity we can expect come October.

"One of the things these Delta Force and Rangers guys were dealing with in Somalia was that a lot of the enemy were just civilians running around with guns. They didn't want to shoot these guys. I mean, some of them were using women as shields. And as much as we want the game to be action-filled and fast, we want to get some of that complexity in there too," says Ed.

They should have learnt – Delta Force doesn't negotiate with terrorists.

"How the addition of vehicles will figure into multiplayer is yet to be seen, but it certainly suggests some interesting possibilities"

The mere idea of enemies using women as human shields certainly suggests a brave design stance on Novalogic's part, though we've since been assured that such devices will not be used in the game. It nevertheless points to an ambitious approach to enemy AI, one that we can only pray they follow through on.

Ed explains: "We're pushing to have some smart AI. For example, if you surprise the enemy, say approaching from behind and getting them at gunpoint, they'll drop their gun and submit. Hopefully players will figure out that they don't have to kill everything, just get them worried."

TRUE GRIT

HOW MUCH SAND CAN YOU STAND?

This year's special forces games are brought to you by the colour beige.

As we've already said a couple of times, *Black Hawk Down* is a very nice looking game. The only problem is that, being set in Somalia, it mostly takes place in the desert. Not the developers' fault, of course, or the Somalis' for that matter, but it does mean that everything is kind of... sand-coloured. And that's fine, if you like your games uniformly brown in hue, but frankly we're a bit fed up with the whole sand/special forces combo at the moment, what with *Ghost Recon: Desert Siege*, *Conflict: Desert Storm*, not to mention the continuing dominance of certain sand-based *Counter-Strike* maps.

By the same token, I predict we're going to be saying the same thing about sweaty jungles in a year or two, what with *Vietcong*, *Platoon*, *CallSign Charlie*, *Conflict: Missing Presumed Dead*, and untold other Vietnam War games all currently in development. Clearly this is no coincidence, being part of some strange safety-in-numbers development policy that seems only to dilute the impact of the individual titles. We don't like it one bit, but what are ya gonna do, eh?

Never check your fuel level with a match.

That fire near those trees is a clear health and safety concern.

Hey, there's a warm patch over here.

"If you want to be the Rambo guy and go and shoot everybody, you can try"

FIGHT OR FLIGHT

To give you a better idea of the overall feel of the game, the main level we played, and the one most suggestive of Ridley Scott's film, begins in a US base on the outskirts of Mogadishu. As soon as the level loads up, the familiar buzz of radio chatter reminds you that you're back in the world of *Delta Force*, a place where rigorous military authenticity is a point of pride. After a quick jog across the dusty base, you're given the ominous order to hop aboard a Black Hawk helicopter and prepare for an assault on Mogadishu. Soon afterwards, you take to the air, still in real-time, and begin zooming over the dunes towards the city. A single false move at this stage could see you tumbling to your death, but soon enough you're approaching downtown Mogadishu, and are far too busy trying to pick off tangos through your rifle scope to worry about such trivialities. Your journey comes to an end atop a terrorist-infested building in the centre of town, whereupon you hop off and continue on foot. It's an exciting way to introduce a level, one influenced as much by games like *Medal Of Honor* as any Hollywood account, and Ed assures us that the entire game will be infused with this impressive sense of cinema.

However, not every mission is going to be such a straightforward urban assault, and other levels promise a variety of close-quarters and long-range combat missions, as well as stealth, sniping and recon.

"We don't want to pigeonhole the player, we want to give them options. If you want to be the Rambo guy and go and shoot everybody, you can try. Or you can be really sneaky, maybe not kill anyone at all. There's always a couple of different ways to play the game."

Ed pauses to fill a couple of local thugs with lead. "Realistically, a lot of players are going to want to just shoot everything that moves and get a stat screen at the end, saying they shot so many enemies. But then, you're not going to have unlimited ammo, so if you're out there drilling everyone down, all of a sudden, hey, you don't have enough ammo to finish the objectives. It's a bit of balancing act, but we think we've got it right."

The way things are shaping up, we've got no reason to argue, though it's going to be a sprint to the finish if *Black Hawk Down* is to hit its over-ambitious October release date. With a game this promising, let's just hope it doesn't come out half-cocked.

All of the single-player missions will be team-based in some form or another.

And they died two by two...

ARX FATALIS

***Rhianna Pratchett* dips into the RPG flood**

It all begins with you waking up near-naked in a goblin dungeon. Much like Dave on his brother's stag party last month.

RPGS ARE like buses. You spend ages waiting for one that's going to take you where you want to go, then three turn up at once. *Dungeon Siege*, *Neverwinter Nights* and *Morrowind* – multi-coloured tour buses, mind you, full of beer fridges, saunas and nubile young wenches beckoning you wantonly inside. But now we're waiting again and the next one on the timetable is Arkane studios' *Arx Fatalis*. Something of a traditional red double decker, this one, not as highly anticipated but nevertheless full of as much satisfying promise as a warm, dry seat away from the mutterers.

PITCH BLACK

Hailed as the spiritual successor to Origin's *Ultima Underworld* games, *Arx Fatalis* takes place in a world of darkness, plunged into a premature ice age by the sun disappearing from the sky. The tribes of men and monsters have been driven underground and carved vast cities from the rock. Now the only ones who dare to set foot on the surface are the intrepid members of the Traveler's Guild. But since then the tribes have started to fight among themselves, threatening the fragile balance of peace in this subterranean world. It's during all of this nasty business that your character finds himself waking up, naked apart from a furry loincloth, in a goblin prison cell.

THE DETAILS

DEVELOPER Arkane Studios
PUBLISHER JoWooD
WEBSITE www.arxfatalis-online.com
OUT TBC

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

- Huge interactive world
- 60 hours of story-driven gameplay
- Advanced AI and stealth elements
- 50 spells with an intuitive 'sign recognition' casting system

"You always have to think and concentrate before casting a spell"

RAPHAEL COLANTONIO
CEO, ARKANE STUDIOS

Spells are cast by drawing out the appropriate runes in the air.

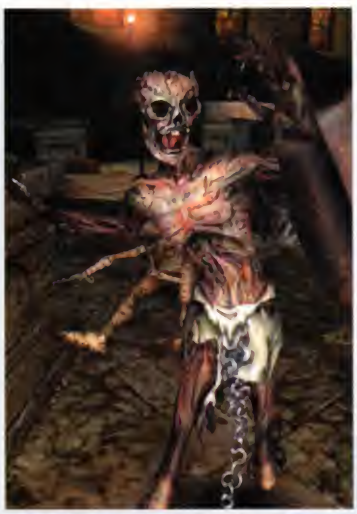
CV

ARKANE STUDIOS

***Arx Fatalis* is Arkane Studios' first game, so here's a look back at what the various team members have worked on previously.**

2000 Some of the Arkane boys worked on *Messiah*, the world's first third-person, puzzle, platform, stealth, shoot 'em up action-adventure. Starring Bob the angel.

2000 Working for developer Shiny, a number of the Arkane team help produce *Sacrifice*, a RTS/RPG hybrid, heavy on the gorgeous graphics but light on the gameplay.



The designers hope the first-person viewpoint will really immerse players.

The game is heavily plot-driven, with tons of sub-quests to flesh out the story.

From then on, well, you know the drill by now. You have to break out of your cell and make your way through the underground world, developing your character's stats and skills while uncovering the mysteries of the land of Arx. But what makes *Arx Fatalis* look like it's going to be a fulfilling experience for RPG gamers is the fact the developers have obviously paid a lot of attention to other titles, including those outside the traditional RPG realm, and created a jigsaw of a game made up of what they see as the best elements of each one.

QUICK DRAW

One of the most obvious aspects that's been adopted is the method of drawing symbols in the air to cast spells, which works in a very similar way to *Black & White*. It's surprising that this hasn't been picked up by role-playing titles before, as it has a hands-on, arcane feel to it, as if you were really going to the effort of performing an invocation rather than just pressing a button. "To be honest; I think that every game designer on earth got the same idea when the first Palm got released back in 95," explains CEO of Arkane Studios, Raphael Colantonio. "It was then only a question of finding the appropriate use for a sign-recognition system, and I think drawing sequences of runes in a real-time RPG is a very good application, as it brings something new to the spell-casting gameplay. You have to compose all of your spells in real-time, summoning the various elements that will make your spell, instead of simply clicking on an icon with no risk. This system changes the gameplay quite a bit, because you always have to think and concentrate before casting a spell."

As your skill in the art of magic increases, you'll be able to cast the basic spells quicker. Just in case faffing around drawing spells while trying to fend off approaching hordes is too much for you, the developers have built in the ability to hotkey a few spells for those with less nimble fingers. But it's immensely more satisfying drawing them by hand.

The real-time combat allows for plenty of cut-and-thrust manoeuvring.

PICK AND MIX

You'll also notice a few *Thief* elements in the mix, including a light gauge to let you know how visible you are to the enemy, and particularly good sound effects which make it seem like something awful is about to happen to you about 99 per cent of the time. There are also more obvious *Ultima* homages in the way you can use plants to make potions and fire to cook raw food or even whip up the occasional pie.

Underlying all these elements is highly story-driven quest-based gameplay, in the best role-playing traditions. While *Arx Fatalis* probably won't be the next *Morrowind*, it certainly has the potential to be a very enjoyable title, put together by a team that are passionate about creating an immersive RPG experience. Watch these pages for news of the latest demo of *Arx Fatalis* coming exclusively to a *PC ZONE* cover disc near you very soon.

Q&A

RAPHAEL COLANTONIO

Raphael Colantonio, head honcho of Arkane Studios, tells us about some of the influences behind *Arx Fatalis*, from *Doom* to *Thief* to *Ultima Underworld*.

PCZ In what ways did the *Ultima Underworld* games influence you?

RAPHAEL *Underworld* is one of these games that had a huge impact on most of us old RPG gamers. I couldn't believe what was on my screen when I first saw it. I think *Underworld* was the perfect RPG. It was a very immersive game and provided freedom in a very interactive world. We've tried to bring back those same gaming values with *Arx Fatalis* and deliver an 'all in one' experience with high accessibility.

PCZ Where else have you drawn influences from?

RAPHAEL For a start, definitely *Ultima VII* for the interactions. You know, all that stuff such as baking bread or making potions was something we really wanted to put in the game. Then there is probably a bit of *Thief: The Dark Project* in *Arx* with our stealth/infiltration elements, and our NPCs show advanced behaviour such as searching, fleeing and helping each other out.

PCZ So you're a bit of a fan of the *Thief* games then?

RAPHAEL In fact, we loved *Thief* so much that we employed Paul Neurath (founder of Looking Glass) to manage the ambient effects composing and voice recording for *Arx Fatalis*. That was really good and it added a lot to the atmosphere.

PCZ Will *Arx Fatalis* be shipping with a toolset or multiplayer options as so many RPGs have done recently?

RAPHAEL We dropped the idea of a multiplayer option when we realised how hard it was to mix the concept of complex multi-threaded scenarios with uncontrollable multiplayer freedom. As for the toolset, there is nothing official, but we'll probably release some 'unsupported' tools and information on how to edit the game.

PCZ What do you think the first-person perspective adds to the game?

RAPHAEL I really think it's the most immersive point of view that can be given to the player. You and your character see exactly the same thing. Remember the first time you played *Doom* in your bedroom at night? Scary wasn't it?

Out with the old, in with the...

NEW WORLD ORDER

Loved by millions, freely available and just a little bit long in the tooth, *Richie Shoemaker* contemplates the end. For *Counter-Strike* that is

Carrying too many weapons will slow you down.

The urban settings feel nice and lived-in, with plenty of everyday details.

THE DETAILS

DEVELOPER Termite Games
PUBLISHER Project 3
WEBSITE www.termite-games.com
OUT September/October

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

- A better looking, better sounding *Counter-Strike*
- Caters for deathmatch, all the way up to 64-player team games
- Original multiplayer game modes are promised
- Full single-player campaign

CV

TERMITE GAMES

Safe from aardvarks and other nasty ant-eating predators, Termite Games is based in Sweden

1997 Insomnia Games is formed and work on *New World Order* begins.

2000 Insomnia has to change its name to Termite Games for legal reasons.

2002 Dutch publisher Project 3 buys Termite Games, lock stock and mound.

YOU WOULD have thought trying to counter the all-conquering *Counter-Strike* would be something of a futile endeavor for an unknown games developer to embark on. So hats off to codesters Termite Games for having the Swedish meatballs to come clean and have their game measured against the grandlady.

On paper the odds are against Termite; *Counter-Strike*'s biggest threat to date was the recent *Global Operations* and that hardly registered a hit, despite the pedigree of its developers (who worked on *Counter-Strike*), and it also had a fair bit of marketing money behind it. Certainly lower in profile and (I'm guessing here) lacking similar financial resources, the form guide says Termite Games will have a tough job bettering *Global Ops*, let alone *Counter-Strike*. On paper, at least.

In the flesh, as it were, *New World Order* fares much better. *Counter-Strike* is looking older by the day. *Global Ops*, powered by the LithTech engine, never looked particularly amazing anyway. *New World Order*, it has to be said, is quite the young stallion.

Developed in-house over many years, Termite Games has constructed for its first game a very competent 3D engine. Dubbed DVA, it boasts such features as real-time per-pixel lighting, bump-mapping, advanced particle and meta-particle rendering and blending. What all this indecipherable guff means is that *New World Order* looks very impressive, and playing through some early code on our rapidly ageing machines, we would say in terms of detail *NWO* is already on a par with *Max Payne* and in the coming months has the potential to better it.

STRIKE-A-LIKE

Graphics are, however, secondary to gameplay and even if it were the case that every raindrop in the game is singularly, dynamically and accurately modelled (which we're told they are), it would matter not a jot if the gameplay was singularly, dynamically and accurately rubbish. Again we can report *NWO* shows some promise, since without wanting to sound derogatory, *New World Order* doesn't so much build on *Counter-Strike* as rebuild it, almost as if *CS* had never existed.

"*Counter-Strike* is a very good game" Admits Jokke Forsryd, audio maestro at Termite Games, "and *New World Order*

High contrast lighting is used to great effect.

is obviously very similar, since they are in the same genre. But we have made many improvements in the interface, the graphics, sound and damage detection. We're just trying to take *Counter-Strike* to the next level."

The similarities are more than just aesthetic upgrades. Mission-wise you can expect the same mix of hostage rescue and bomb defusing action that *Counter-Strike* provides. It's spread across 12 urban levels taking in settings as diverse as tight cobbled streets and sprawling shipping ports, with just the odd country mansion for good measure. The good news is that *NWO* plans to cater for all tastes, from simple one-on-one deathmatches all the way up to 64-player team games. Termite assures us that it plans to introduce a number of original game modes too, though of course it's keeping such things under its helmet.

AUDIO DYNAMITE

Although we could only play a couple of deathmatch levels, if there was one thing that impressed us most it was the potential for some seriously frantic firefights. Indoors especially there is a lot of detail, with every element of the scenery offering some impressive graphical feedback when fired upon. Even with just two combatants across a single room, you'll see shell casings ejecting everywhere, with plaster chipping off the walls and wood shavings flying through the air. Along with the graphics, the effect is heightened by the wonderful sounds, which are as varied as they are relentless.

Counter-Strike players will feel immediately at home playing *New World Order*, but there are some interesting differences. Although you get a score rather than cash for your bloodletting, points are dished out based on the amount of health you take away rather than simple kills. What this means is that if you take away 99 per cent of someone's health and someone comes along and takes your kill, you still get 99 per cent of the bounty. Different too is that you can carry more than a couple of weapons. However, each item you carry has a weight and the more you carry, the slower you will be. Simple and effective, which is just as it should be.

Though it may seem slightly unfair to dub *New World Order* as just another *Counter-Strike*, that is precisely what it is. Despite its age, *CS* is still incredibly popular and compared to *NWO*, totally free to the millions who already own a copy of *Half-Life*. Whether or not *NWO* will be better than *Counter-Strike* is a difficult one to call at this stage, but it certainly has the potential to go all the way.

New World Order is an unknown game from an unknown developer, as was *Counter-Strike* and *Half-Life* before it. We shall be keeping a close eye on its progress and we suggest you do the same. PCZ

Q&A

JOKKE FORSRYD

Termite Games' chief audio designer talks guns.

PCZ How many weapons are in the game?
JOKKE There are 17 weapons and grenades. All the weapons are modelled on real weapons, but the sound is slightly tweaked, just to make things more interesting. I've heard most of them in real life anyway and they all sound the same.

PCZ Why can't you lay prone or lean around corners?
JOKKE You'll be able to lean left and right in the final game, but not lay down.

PCZ Why are there no player-classes in the game?
JOKKE What's the point? You design, balance and playtest them, then most people end up playing as the regular soldier anyway. It's best to let people create their own class, based on the weapons they prefer, which is why we put the weight system in instead. If you want to be a scout, just buy a handgun or an Uzi. Players do go up in rank during the game, which opens up more weapons.

PCZ How will you support the game after release?
JOKKE There will be some new maps released after the game is out. People will also be able to create mods and levels, as we will be releasing tools with the game. We use Gmax to make the models, which is a free download already.

Modders take note: the game will ship with comprehensive editing tools.

"We're just trying to take *Counter-Strike* to the next level"

JOKKE FORSRYD
TERMITE GAMES

PROFILE

MATHIEU FERLAND

DEVELOPER: Ubi Soft Montreal
POSITION: Producer
FAVOURITE GAME?
I like sim sports games in particular, and the co-op mode in *Halo*.
FIRST GAME YOU EVER PLAYED?
The first game I played for any length of time was *Galaxion* by Midway. It was simple gameplay but very well balanced.

Oi!...

FERLAND, what's your game?

SPLINTER CELL

***Rhianna Pratchett* is back in black and is sneaking through the shadows to find out the latest news on this year's most anticipated stealth game**

THE DETAILS

DEVELOPER Ubi Soft Montreal
PUBLISHER Ubi Soft
WEBSITE www.ubi.com
OUT Christmas 2002

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

- An immersive and realistic environment
- Gorgeous graphics employing soft body technology and dynamic lighting
- Overseen by the great Tom Clancy
- Plenty of weapons, gadgets and special moves to play with

CV

Ubi Soft

UBI SOFT MONTREAL

The Canadian wing of Ubi Soft is currently celebrating its 5th year and now consists of more than 400 staff. It has designed numerous games for a variety of platforms, and its PC titles include the following...

1998 *Speed Busters* was a ridiculously arcadey and idiot-proof racing game that found quite a few of us slapping our keyboards even more than we normally do.

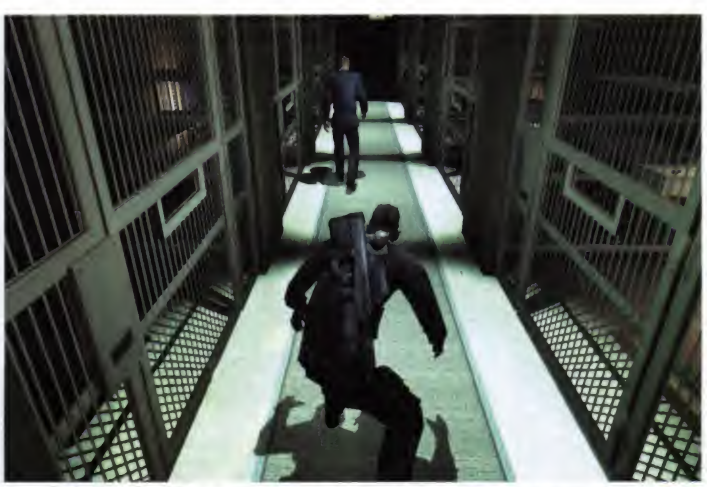
2001 *Rainbox Six: Rogue Spear Black Thorn* is a standalone *Rogue Spear* outing. It's one of the best in the series despite the fact that it features some rather dim terrorists.

HE'S HARDER than Snake, cooler than Neo. He's got more hair than the Hitman and he can spread his legs further than the kids from *Fame*. His name is Sam Fisher, the only hero you'll ever need and he's coming to a small screen near you this Christmas in Ubi Soft's stealth/action game *Splinter Cell*. *PC ZONE* snuck up on Mathieu Ferland, *Splinter Cell*'s producer, and gently coaxed some information out of him.

PCZ You must have heard the recent comments from Hideo Kojima (creator of *Metal Gear Solid*)? He was quoted as saying: "I'm really looking forward to that game. It would be great if we could just turn *Splinter Cell* into *Metal Gear Solid X*." How did that make you feel?

MATHIEU It's always flattering to get those kind of comments, and I think the team was very pleased, especially as it was good coverage for us. We were surprised that such a comment would come from him.

PCZ It seems to us that there's more than a few passing similarities between



Sam Fisher stalks his way to another sly goosing.

Splinter Cell and games like *Metal Gear Solid*, *Hitman* and the *Thief* games, but where do you think you've taken your influences from?

MATHIEU Of course we looked at other games on the market and got a lot of inspiration out of them. But the main idea of the game was to create an interactive environment. We came up with the idea of being able to switch lights on and off early on, which worked perfectly with the stealth aspect. We focused a lot on this and also the management of the player's shadow, which I think is the difference between *Splinter Cell* and a lot of titles out there. But all stealth games are based around the same kind of concepts and ideas. Our light gauge is similar to the one in the *Thief* games for example. We're not reinventing, we're trying to pick the best things and improve on them and then innovate by mixing the right ingredients together.

Lose it here and you're in a world of hurt.

PCZ The American version of the game is called *Tom Clancy's Splinter Cell*. The big TC is usually associated with hardcore military sims, what benefits do you think his input has brought to the game?

MATHIEU The Tom Clancy franchise, apart from videogames, is mostly mass market because it deals with subjects that affect everyone. In the videogame industry Tom Clancy is associated with tactics and realism, which is what we're focusing on in the games. We also needed to adapt the Clancy world for a wider audience. Maybe people will think at first 'Oh, this is Tom Clancy, I'm not sure I can handle it,' but as soon as they pick it up they'll see how easy the controls are. The game has an easy and natural learning curve, which includes two training levels, showing you how to use the gadgets and control the camera. Tom Clancy is a universe, which fitted in well with our concept and he's well known in the States. I'm not sure his name in itself will have that much of an impact on sales, but this collaboration with him has benefited the game a great deal.

He's been involved at every step from the concept through to approving gadgets and making the storyline tighter. He'll also be putting his final seal of approval on the master build. He had more input at the start of the game when everything was being built, now it's more of a case of approving things like the realism of the thermal goggles.

PCZ Obviously Clancy is best known world-wide for his action-packed novels and film spin offs. How did he contribute to the storyline behind *Splinter Cell*?

Don't... move... a... muscle.

MATHIEU The concept of *Splinter Cell* itself, before adapting it to the Tom Clancy franchise, was pretty tight anyway. We had to modify a good part of it to make it more realistic, especially with gadgets, the clothing and the story behind it because Clancy always justifies everything in his work. His stories are always set in the very near future so everything needs to be credible.

We provided some basic ideas like the Splinter Cell itself being the new face of terrorism and he came back with some great ideas on how different political and military situations could be played out.

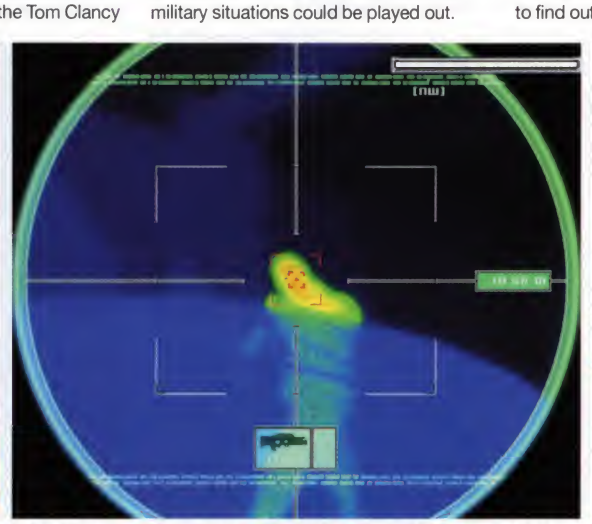
PCZ So what can you tell us about the storyline?

MATHIEU The story is about the new President of the former Soviet Republic of Georgia who forms an underground terrorist army and declares a kind of guerilla cyber war on the United States after NATO invades his country. It's a war fought through propaganda and the media, so you never really know what's going to happen next. After two CIA agents disappear you're sent in as part of the Third Echelon counter-terrorist group to find out what's happened to them.

"We're not reinventing, we're trying to pick the best things and improve on them and then innovate by mixing the right ingredients together"

MATHIEU FERLAND
PRODUCER OF SPLINTER CELL

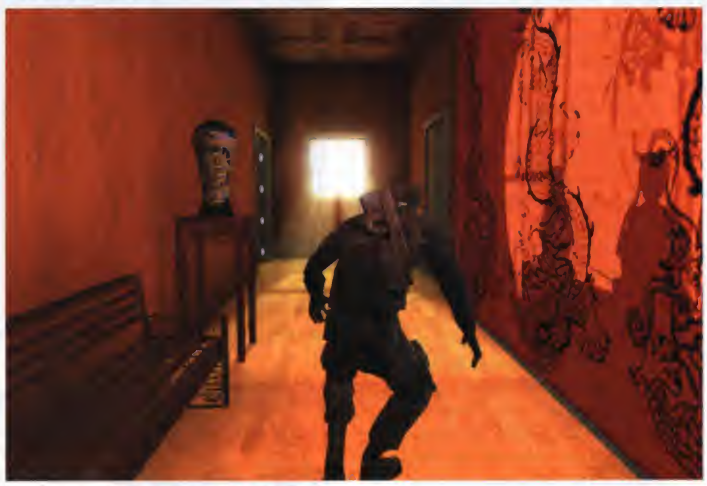
Stairs are for pussies.



Where would a Tom Clancy game be without thermal goggles?

They call him The Gibbon.

"You can play the game in full stealth mode, and as long as you take it slow and use the right gadgets and weapons you can go through the game without being detected"



Noooooooo don't go towards the light.

I don't want to spoil too much of the story but it's up to the individual player to decide how much of the plot they want to uncover and pay attention to. You don't have to watch the cinematics, or listen to the dialogues. On the other hand you can go through the game and pick up all the memory sticks you can (computer chips that contain useful information) and pay attention to everything and you'll discover all the little plot details.

PCZ You tested out a lot of the weapons and gadgets that appear in the game first hand, what was that like?
MATHIEU Well, firing a weapon is a very violent experience; you just don't imagine how loud it is in real life and how much it hurts. You can't believe people really go out and use them in missions. But players will be able to trust the weapons and the gadgets they see in *Splinter Cell*, because we tested out the real life weapons and gadgets very early on in the development process.

PCZ As Sam Fisher you'll get to use a whole heap of stealth gadgets such as snake cams that can be used to see under doors and thermal goggles. What's your favourite gadget in the game?
MATHIEU My favourite gadget is the sticky camera (a small camera that sticks to walls) because it allows you to see areas you wouldn't be able to see otherwise and I believe it's quite innovative. There are actually two sticky cameras in the game. One which you can control and do things like zoom in and out or change it to night or thermal vision, and another that emits a whistling noise and releases gas when an enemy comes close.

The look of a hero.

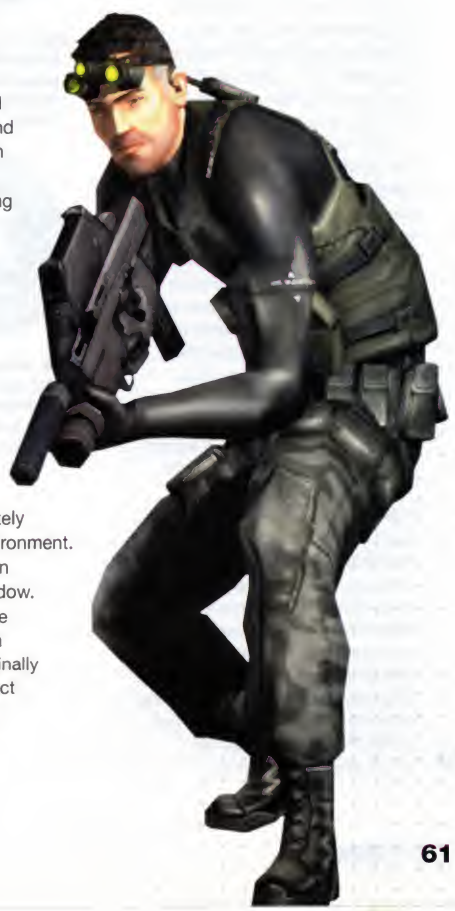
PCZ How will the AI of the enemies you encounter work?
MATHIEU The enemy has different levels of awareness. You can play the game in full stealth mode, and as long as you take it slow and use the right gadgets and weapons at the right time you can go through the game without being detected. If you trigger the alarms then the NPCs will go to a higher state of awareness and they'll be looking for changes in the environment such as shadows so that they can track you down. If you keep making mistakes then their awareness will go even higher and it will make it very difficult for you to complete the mission.

PCZ What other characters will you meet and will you be able to play as anyone other than Sam?
MATHIEU There's Lambert who's the leader of the Third Echelon and there are a couple of female characters, one who works in the field and shows you the different gadgets and how they work at the start of the missions. But one of the goals of *Splinter Cell* was to create a new hero in Sam Fisher, and although his outfit and inventory change throughout the game, you'll always be playing as Sam.

PCZ What's your favourite aspect of the game?
MATHIEU I like the way you can play through missions over again using different tactics. I like experimenting with different ways. Sometimes I'll play it safe and turn off all the lights, or I'll go through and just shoot everyone. Or I'll just try and go through the mission only using one gadget.

PCZ Two of the most impressive aspects of the game are the dynamic lighting and the soft body texture (which makes objects like material or sheet plastic move in a realistic way). What do you think they add to the game?
MATHIEU Soft body is mostly a graphical feature. But it was so impressive that we decided to use it in objects like flags and spider webs. When mixed with the dynamic lighting system, this can provide very interesting effects. It will tell the player if there's an enemy in hiding or it will tell the enemy that you are hiding behind something depending on where the lighting is coming from. You have to be careful and really watch your shadow.

The dynamic lighting was developed to serve the gameplay. If you can turn the lights on and off it completely changes the nature of the environment. You can tell a lot about what an enemy is doing from their shadow. The way we decided to use the shadowing in conjunction with the soft body texture was originally a bug because we didn't expect the shadow to appear on both sides of the mesh, but in fact it looks so good we decided to keep it. PCZ



REVIEWS

HOT UNDER THE COLLAR

■ **REVIEWS EDITOR** Martin Korda

July was far from easy for the *ZONE* team. The scorching heat drove up everyone's body temperature, causing the kind of erratic behaviour usually reserved for the criminally insane and eccentric geniuses wracked with psychologically debilitating self hatred.

An example: every day while reviewing *Sudden Strike II* (page 76) stand-in deputy editor Steve came in dressed in full military fatigues, and spent the whole day trying to goad us into giving him a multiplayer game. When he started sporadically prodding Holden in the head with a riding whip and slapping him round the face with a pair of leather gloves, we were left with little choice but to bundle him into a storeroom and lock him in until he regained his sanity. Two weeks on and there's been little improvement. As I write, he's screaming propaganda messages at a stack of *PC ZONE* back issues and drawing battle plans on the wall with a crayon. The lunatic.

He wasn't alone though. After several days of playing *Beach Life* (page 68), resident cynic Steve Hill decided he was going to pack it in as a game reviewer and become a club rep in Spain. In order to gain some much needed experience he started quaffing beer from the moment he got up (just before *Countdown*) and continued to do so until he started singing *Rule Britannia* at the top of his voice and insulting the local populace for no apparent reason. A long and exciting career lies ahead of him.

Fortunately the heat hasn't affected me at all. Having recently been crowned King of England, I've burnt Dave at the stake for believing that an orange is round, rather than flat, and bred a new kind of super-alien by getting an Alien and a Predator to become amorous in a squidgy kind of way. Oh yeah, and I've also been playing *Medieval: Total War* (page 64) and *AvP2: Primal Hunt* (page 80), which were a lot of fun too.

Steel yourself for battle. The sequel to the world's greatest RTS has arrived. Turn to page 64 for our verdict.

Only games that score 90 per cent or more receive the coveted Classic award. The best of the best.

The second tier award for games scoring between 80 and 89 per cent. Essential purchases.

THE ZONE SCORING SYSTEM

Some people (mainly game publishers) say that our scoring system is harsh. It's not. It's honest and built around the seemingly outdated idea that 50 per cent is an average score. Likewise, 70 per cent is a good score, anything above 80 per cent is excellent, and 90 per cent and above is a Classic. Talking of Classic awards, don't expect to see one every issue as we don't chuck them around like confetti.

OUR REVIEWERS

We think our reviewers are the best in the business. Each one is a specialist in numerous genres and will have played every major release so no game is judged in isolation. We also make sure the right game gets reviewed by the right person, which means that you won't see Steve Hill reviewing an RPG and we won't let Rhianna loose on *FIFA 2003*. We know that occasionally you might disagree with us but we're big enough to take criticism. You can email your thoughts to letters@pczone.co.uk, or get them off your chest instantly on the forums at www.pczone.co.uk. If you think you can do better then why not send us a review – if it's good enough we'll print it in the magazine.

ONLINE REVIEWS AND REVIEW UPDATES

We review a lot of games before they go on sale, and if there are no public servers running before we go to print we won't second guess how the game's going to play online. Instead you'll find dedicated online reviews of all the major releases in our regular Update section. This is also the place where we take a fresh look at games we think have changed significantly – as is the case with persistent online games or through major patch releases.

MEET THE TEAM

	DAVE WOODS	STEVE O'HAGAN
What are you currently playing?	*GTA III*	*Laser Squad Nemesis* and *Medieval: Total War*
If you had to be a Medieval military unit, what would it be?	The Coventry Cannon Straddler	The Bridgend Botty Brigand

MEDIEVAL: TOTAL WAR
Let the carnage begin

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MARTIN KORDA
Medieval: Total War and *AVP2: Primal Hunt*
The Bratislavian Bear Baiter

ANTHONY HOLDEN
GTA III and *Laser Squad Nemesis*
The Spam Javelineer

RHIANNA PRATCHETT
Stronghold: Crusader
The Gothic Garrotter of Gethsemane

MARK HILL
GTA III
The Madrid Mangonel Mauler

CHRIS ANDERSON
Morrowind
The Birmingham Bonce Basher

STEVE HILL
I'm back on *Champ Manager*
Chester Chester Pike Molester

MEDIEVAL: TOTAL WAR

■ £39.99 | Pub: Activision | Dev: Creative Assembly | ETA: August 30 | www.totalwar.com

REQUIRES PII 350 (PIII 750 for multiplayer), 128Mb RAM and a 16Mb 3D card **DESIRES** PIII 700 (P4 1GHz for multiplayer), 256Mb RAM and a 32Mb 3D card

Martin Korda **gets suited up for the sequel to the greatest RTS of all time. (No, that's not him below)**

PC ZONE Z CLASSIC

INPERSPECTIVE

SHOGUN: TOTAL WAR
Reviewed Issue 89, Score 93%
Now available for a mere tenner, it may be smaller in scope and have a less involving main campaign, but pound for pound, it's still the better-value game.

WARRIOR KINGS
Reviewed Issue 114, Score 90%
If you want a great storyline to go with your stunning 3D landscapes and epic battles, then *Warrior Kings* is your best bet. A new patch is on its way which will hopefully fix the majority of the niggles that the game still carries.

The new zoom function means you can view the action from up close, and experience the true terrors of war.

"And we'd all like some figgy pudding..."

NOW I'M not going to lie to you – after all, it's no secret. I loved *Shogun: Total War*. It was the first game that allowed the unwashed, sun-starved masses of the world's gaming community to experience PC-based war on a gargantuan scale. From the confines of its desk-bound grey box, it threw out previously unhinted-at challenges, cerebral conundrums that would vex the vacuous denizens of the world of 2D isometric RTS mundanity, and liberate those sickened by a genre riddled with stagnation, pitiful shortcomings and odious predictability.

Magnificent 3D vistas rolling into a seemingly never-ending horizon, air resonating with war cries of those already condemned to death as they charge towards seemingly unmovable enemy hordes. That's what *Shogun* was all about. Not endless resource collecting and mindless base rushing, bereft of any need for strategic nous, prevalent in the kind of products pedalled by every street-corner developer intent on boarding the ever flagging *C&C* rip-off train. Those who to this day scrabble around like starved birds for scraps, as they devour every last crumb the gaming public unquestioningly throws at their grubby feet.

Shogun was a revolution, and as with everything ground-breaking, it instilled fear into the 'don't like change' majority, who shunned it as though it were a leper, heads turned away in case its infectious genius were to captivate them and draw them away from the familiarity that infested their hard drives. But the brilliance of *Shogun*, now some 30 months old, has lived on, touching enough people's hearts and wallets to warrant a sequel, *Medieval: Total War*. So bow down and pay homage. The King has returned.

"Bow down and pay homage. The King has returned"

THE SAGA CONTINUES

Chapter two of the *Total War* saga sails west, away from feudal Japan to the powder keg of Medieval Europe. Starting a few short years after Harold cried: "What arrow?" at the Battle of Hastings, it spans a near 400-year period from 1087 to 1453, encompassing Europe, Asia Minor and North Africa in its colossal game map. In comparison, *Shogun* was a mere microcosm of *Medieval*'s immensity, a precursor to a far steeper challenge which stares menacingly back at you from your monitor here.

Now, without wanting to take on the appearance of a slap-headed history professor who skulks around university libraries, reading thrillers like 'Tosswig's Guide To Medieval Agricultural Practices (1100-1218)' and boring the shit out of disinterested students – a little historical background if you please. The 400-year period recreated here is famous for its brutality, political intrigue, border instability and religious fanaticism. Do you love your King unquestioningly? No? Right lads, string 'em up by their intestines from the nearest tree! It was a time of crusades and

It's raining arrows, hallelujah.

"Excuse me. Has anyone seen Billy Fieldman? He's wearing armour and is riding a horse."

ethnic hatred. Never-ending war, marital allegiances, inquisitions and espionage. All of which added up to one gargantuan ruck. It was basically conquer or be conquered, and survival, let alone prosperity, wasn't easy. Not easy at all.

As with its predecessor, *Medieval*'s main campaign is partitioned into two distinct sections, the turn-based *Risk*-style campaign map, and the stunning, fully 3D RTS combat levels. The two parts are not only monumentally diverse, but so clinically detailed that they could happily stand proud as games in their own right, as both are packed to busting point with sublime gameplay. So let's tackle them one at a time. Which one do you want first? Risk? Is that a nod I see? Right, Risk it is then.

OK, own up. Which one of you just let one go?

RISKY STYLEE PART

First off you've got to choose a faction, with your choices varying depending on which one of the three periods you choose to start off in (Early, High or Late). Then it's off to war to knock some heretic or infidel skulls together and impose your will on a quivering peasantry, whose sole goal in life is to grow enough yams to support their 17 scurvy-riddled children throughout the winter months. This is done by moving your troops into enemy provinces, and either taking control of the battle yourself (patience I'm getting to that bit), or having the computer automatically resolve each conflict. However, there is another way which doesn't involve just wading in mindlessly, scimitar flailing. You see, you can be diplomatic as well as violent. Yes, diplomatic. You know, bullshitting to everyone you come into contact with in order to get what you want. An alliance you say? Sure thing, comrade (you deformed skin-diseased oik). Using your diplomatic pawns (emissaries, seductive princesses, paid-for top-dollar whores, you know the score) you can forge allegiances with any nation on the map. Of course you can break these at any time and charge in unannounced, massacring the unsuspecting populace, sacking their cities for loot and leaving their twig homes in flames while gutting their men and forcefully inseminating their womanfolk. Sounds like fun (so says Dave – the sicko).

"You can be diplomatic as well as violent. Yes, diplomatic"

Do that, if that's the path you want to go down. You evil bastard! I bet you're the kind of person who'd sell their mother for a handful of festering pork scratchings, wouldn't you? Never mind... What *Medieval* does superbly is reflect your actions in the way the rest of the gameworld views your king and generals. Massacre innocent Catholics and the Pope will ex-communicate you, leaving the door open for all your previous Catholic buddies to have a go at wiping you out. Break too many alliances and no one will want to be your friend, shunning you at G8 summits and secretly mocking you behind your back for being a poo-poo head. Conversely, if you brutally massacre anyone who opposes you, your Dread rating will soar, meaning obedience won't be hard to come by, and enemies will fear you more than a young boy would a boarding-school headmaster in a deserted dorm.

SHIP OUT

Ships and trading routes also make a debut, although they are somewhat limited as there's no real-time combat options for naval warfare. However, along with a multitude of technological, agricultural, building (including castles) and economic upgrades, the strategy map offers a diverse tech-tree and plenty of economic decision in terms of what to build, where to build it and in what order. You'll also have to deal with your fair share of revolts, conspiracies and assassination attempts if you're to survive.

Now, if you're shaking with fear at the thought of all this, relax. Stop being a pathetic simpering coward and get a grip before I come round and slap

COME 'ERE, COME 'ERE, THERE'S MORE

IT'S NOT ALL TURN-BASED TROOP SHUFFLING YOU KNOW

So tell me Frankie, just how do you manage to get your beard looking so neat?

Medieval doesn't just offer a 400-year campaign. Oh no. There are a number of historical campaigns in which you fight a series of key battles from past wars (good for those who don't like the turn-based elements). There's also the option to fight custom battles, and with more than 100 maps to choose from, and with an easy-to-use if slightly glitched map editor (there's no height limiter, so you can create ridiculous near-vertical hills which troops will happily swarm over like ants on an ant hill) you'll find months of enjoyment are to be had.

Wait till you see the whites of their eyes, lads.

"Deal with conspiracies, revolts and assassination attempts to survive"

some sense into you. And stop crying, you're smudging the ink. That's better. Now for the good news. If you don't fancy handling any part of the turn-based campaign bar the building and shifting of armies, then you can simply get the computer to do it for you. Simple. Easy. So now there can be no excuse for anyone to fear *Medieval* for being overly complex, not even you, you great poopy-panted cry-baby.

THE COMBATTY PART

So, onto the meat of *Medieval*. The war bit. The bit where you get to indulge every sadistic and blood-loving bone in your hate-filled body.

Much remains the same from the killing fields of *Shogun*, although there are several nuances to tax your battlefield prowess – or lack of it if you're a tactical idiot. Most notably castle battles. Proper castle battles. Well, kind of anyway.

In *Shogun*, castle builders always forgot to build a door. Imagine the conversation: "Let's go over the castle checklist shall we Kenji?" "OK boss." "Walls?" "Check." "A place to house the troops?" "Check." "Anything else we need?" "Nah." "OK, let's go and catch the Sumo," That wouldn't happen in *Medieval*. Here, strongholds are monstrous constructions. Towering into the sky like mountains, they come packed to the portcullis with archer towers, which rain down death on the artillery teams trying to knock holes in the walls for your army to mass through.

The campaign map is far larger than *Shogun*'s.

However, it's certainly not the definitive word in siege warfare, and you often end up simply pulling back your troops to avoid the arrows before a decent-sized hole is created to run through. Fortunately, on the harder levels, the enemy will send out troops to destroy your siege weapons, creating a fine line between moving your troops away from arrow range and leaving your mangonels prone to attack.

SOLDIERS HAVE FEELINGS TOO

Creative Assembly has certainly been thorough in recreating each country's landscape. Denmark is all flatlands, Asia full of deserts and southern Europe very hilly. Weather has also been well replicated to reflect each region's climate, and can significantly influence your tactics. Rain reduces the accuracy of arrows, and heat and sandstorms will make heavily armoured soldiers flag very quickly. Terrain advantage is also pivotal to a battle, such as height bonuses for archers. Every soldier-type has a role, a strength and a weakness for you to exploit. The tactical subtleties are endless, and it's this feature which still distinguishes the *Total War* series from just about every other RTS. Troop morale is shown through simple, yet informative descriptions, be they 'Happy that the flanks are covered' or 'Worried by the amount of friendly casualties'. To top things off, you even get to execute captured enemy soldiers during each battle, and you can watch the carnage of conflict unfold from up close with a modest zoom function.

Nowhere else is the sheer thrill of battle replicated with such ferocity and energy as here, where realism pours from every blood-smattered pore like sweat from a fevered alcoholic. This is where *Medieval*'s true genius lies, and with more than 100 units to send to their deaths, the replay value is near endless. And that's even before we get to the AI, which once again is little short of fiendish (although on very rare, random occasions, enemy troops will stand right next to your forces, stoically admiring the landscape as you gleefully make mincemeat of them). To top things off, the unparalleled atmosphere is further enhanced by a stunningly evocative soundtrack from BAFTA winner Jeff van Dyck and some blood-curdling sound effects.

The 3D battles then, are unrivalled. But before you drown in a flood of euphoria from all these superlatives I've been liberally throwing around, there is a big but for you to consider.

BUT...

Now don't get me wrong. *Medieval* has indeed displaced *Shogun* from the summit of strategy gaming, a war sim with no equal. But it could have been so much more. Ultimately, *Medieval* is a beefed-up version of *Shogun*, extending many of its ideas and regurgitating countless more. And you just can't help feeling a little cheated by this. We've waited more than two years for a sequel and what's here simply isn't enough of a leap forward. More of a determined shuffle actually. There are so many ideas that could have been implemented but simply aren't here (see the Missed Opportunity panel). And it's disappointing.

So, a must-buy? Yes. The next chapter of the RTS revolution? Definitely not. Regardless of this though, it's still the ultimate strategy gaming experience, which will capture your heart like a rapacious Spanish Inquisitor. The King has returned. Long live the King. PCZ

SECOND OPINION

***STEVE* 'THE WIDOW-MAKER' *O'HAGAN* GIVES HIS TUPPENCE WORTH**

I may look like a slack-jawed tweaze artist, but I too was a big fan of the bood 'n' thunder of *Shogun*. And despite installing *Medieval* only to find it played almost identically, and that the graphics engine hadn't massively improved, the sound of slaughter was like music to my ears. OK, so the lack of improvements on the multiplayer mode is a letdown, but just look at the expanded campaign mode – the whole of Europe, North Africa and the Middle East awaits your armies. Many nations have unique units, and each country has differing terrain. And if you've the mettle to take on the four-century-long main campaign, get ready for many a satisfyingly blood-soaked late night.

MISSED OPPORTUNITY

CREATIVE ASSEMBLY MISSES OPPORTUNITY TO TOTALLY WIPE OUT THE OPPOSITION

It could have been so much more. For starters, why isn't there a multiplayer campaign mode or the option for two human commanders to take on the computer in a 3D battle? Castle sieges could also have been enhanced greatly with the addition of battering rams, burning oil, siege ladders and the ability to line the walls with archers. And what about naval battles? That would have been superb. Some more powerful zoom options would also have been welcome to give you a better view of the battlefield.

Even in Medieval times, termites were a considerable problem.

PCZONE VERDICT

- ✔ Massive and compelling 400-year campaign
- ✔ Stunning 3D battles
- ✔ Unparalleled atmosphere
- ✔ Superbly tactical
- ✘ Too similar to *Shogun*
- ✘ Occasional AI glitches

90

Still the ultimate RTS, but could have been even better

A beer and a burger. What more do you want?

BEACH LIFE

■ £29.99 | Pub: Eidos Interactive | Dev: Deep Red Games | ETA: September | www.eidosinteractive.co.uk

REQUIRES PII 233, 64Mb RAM and a 2Mb 3D card **DESIRES** PIII 500, 128Mb RAM and an 8Mb 3D card

Fun in the sun, or a wet weekend? *Steve Hill* takes a cheap holiday to enjoy other people's misery in this hugely hyped Tycoon game

IF YOU'RE reading this on holiday, put it down, slap on some Hawaiian Tropic, get yourself a Pina Colada, and... look at the arse on that! Don't forget to send us a postcard. Assuming the more likely scenario that you're sat at home on your own, cradling the magazine in your pasty white arms, check out the surrounding pictures and know that all this could be yours. Blazing sun, clear blue seas, water sports, pounding music, all-night dancing, cheap booze, prolific sexual encounters, exotic food, chronic diarrhoea, sunburn, drunken violence, mindless vandalism, shark attacks, drowning... Sounds fun, doesn't it? Welcome to *Beach Life*, your virtual package holiday. My name's Steve and I'll be your rep during your stay with us. We hope you have a great time.

"Drunken violence, mindless vandalism, shark attacks, drowning... Sounds fun"

When we say virtual holiday, don't go cancelling that fortnight in Tosser Del Mar just yet. It's not quite Arnie in *Total Recall*. In fact, you don't really get to go on holiday at all. Instead, you get to watch other people pissing it up the wall while you sit around worrying about the bank balance. Yep, as all but the most ill-informed readers will have by now ascertained, *Beach Life* is of course yet another addition to the ever-growing pantheon of *Tycoon* games. In a more boring world, it would be called 'Resort Management', which is probably something you can get a degree in these days.

If you've ever played this type of thing, you'll know the form, and success revolves around keeping all of the people happy all of the time. Happiness in this case is largely defined by the ability to get roaring drunk, dance like a gibbon, and enjoy meaningless al fresco coupling. Suffice to say, it's a bit of a departure from *Industry Giant II*.

ON THE BEACH

Where to start then? Given the Club 18-30 predilection of the bulk of your clientele, a bar is usually the best place, and for convenience's sake you might as well whack it on the beach. The drunken hordes are going to need something to soak up the ale, so once the bar is up and running, you can open a beach

We're not in Blackpool now.

A quick word from our sponsors. Other billboards are available.

And just where do you think you're going?

INPERSPECTIVE

TROPICO
Reviewed Issue 104, Score 59%
If you prefer a Fascist dictatorship to a cheesy resort, this is your game.

THE SIMS: ON HOLIDAY
Reviewed Issue 104, Score 66%
One of many average expansion packs for *The Sims*. More intimate than *BL*, but somewhat mindless.

"Get drunk, dance like a gibbon, and enjoy meaningless al fresco coupling"

barbecue, enabling them to wolf down limp pats of gristle like the savages they are. More discerning punters might fancy a bit of a sit-down, so you open a fancy restaurant, at greater expense but with an increased benefit to the overall rating of the resort.

There's more to a holiday than filling your face though, so activities can be provided in the form of pedaloes, windsurfing, fishing trips and other water sports. Some guests may not fancy getting wet, particularly if it's raining, so there is also land-based fun such as amusement arcades and casinos, with the 'technology tree' opening up to reveal an array of entertainment. More mundane structures are also essential, with mechanics required to maintain buildings, reps to keep people happy, cleaners to pick up litter, security guards to stop scuffling, and lifeguards to prevent weak swimmers from going home in an oak cloak.

Looks like they've necked a couple of Smileys.

SANDY CRACK

Much has been made of the lewd behaviour featured in the game, and it is all present and correct as promised. *Beach Life* ably runs the gamut of fighting, spewing and shagging, with sex on the beach proving to be a lot more than a cheesy summer hit. It's basically a microcosm of Brits on the piss, and the action is clearly inspired by the likes of Sky's *Ibiza Uncovered* and ITV's *Club Reps*. However, unlike them, *Beach Life* is not a documentary, and your guests' behaviour is largely determined by what type of beer you sell them. For instance, Thumpers causes them to hit each other, Smashers to break things, and Cape Horn to rut like beasts in heat.

The one thing that *Beach Life* doesn't represent is a key reason why a lot of young people go on holiday: to take vast amounts of mind-altering drugs. Whereas narcotics can be freely mentioned in books, films and television, they can't appear in a game because games are perceived as being on the same intellectual level as My Little Pony. So while it's OK to graphically portray physical violence, penetrative sexual intercourse and death by drowning or shark attack (replete with the sea turning red), you can't show someone having a smoke or necking half a pill. Of course, you can't really blame Eidos for this omission – it would have become a millstone round its neck – and in a fairly tenuous fudging of the issue, there is a beer called Smileys, which makes people happy and want to dance.

MISSED OPPORTUNITY

A HOLIDAY RESORT IN DESPERATE NEED OF MORE DRINKING TIME

Sometimes, less than halfway through a level, it becomes apparent that you're not going to win it, and then it's just a case of going through the motions until you run out of time. When you reach the end of your allotted time without achieving the necessary goals, it comes to an abrupt halt and you are given the opportunity to restart the scenario, something you may not feel like doing having just wasted two hours of your life on it. An idea might have been to offer some extra time, with a penalty being carried over into the next level in the form of less cash or time, or even a different level, with the game branching into easier or harder tasks, depending on your previous performance.

"Lifeguards are essential to prevent swimmers going home in an oak cloak"

SECOND OPINION

THE SUN DEFINITELY DOESN'T SHINE OUT OF THIS ONE'S BACKSIDE, SAYS *MARTIN KORDA*

I have to admit to being a little less taken with *Beach Life* than Steve. Actually, quite a lot less taken if I'm being truthful. Now I know I didn't play it for anything like as long, but quite frankly, I didn't want to either. I can't help but feel that had the subject matter been slightly different, say an Old People's Home where you have to build bowling lawns and make sure there are plenty of cleaners on hand to deal with the dribblings of the incontinent, it would have been dismissed as little more than an above-average and slightly novel tycoon game. OK, so it's a bit quirky, and its attempts at humour sometimes raise a smirk, but as Hill rightly points out, it just comes down to managing numbers and doing what you're told by the messages at the bottom of the screen. A baboon could do it. However, as these games go, it's one of the better ones, and although there's nothing original in the gameplay department, the titillating and slightly controversial subject matter does help cover up the genre's inadequacies enough to make *Beach Life* more entertaining than most of its competitors.

The Wet T-Shirt Contest gets underway. You can't buy class.

CIRCLE JERK

Despite its contemporary setting, *Beach Life* features time-honoured gameplay that will be familiar to anyone who has dabbled with the bulk of the titles featured in the Top 10 God Games at the back of this magazine. Problems require solutions, which in turn throw up further problems, and the whole thing is one great big revolving brain teaser. Ultimately, it's just manipulating mathematics beneath an elaborate graphical interface, and you can find yourself beginning to think like a game designer: determine price, employ response, add sound, add animation...

While the setting is bang up to date, it can't really be said to be advancing the genre. You can't rotate the map, and the graphics can politely be described as dated (although in its favour it will run on your dad's PC). The interface is very menu-heavy, and though the subject matter hints at mass appeal, many will be put off by the over-reliance on number crunching.

There is also an element of over-egging the pudding: do you really need to decorate your resort with a choice of 13 different types of shrub and 18 different types of tree? Furthermore, the 12 islands that make up the self-contained missions – such as getting 50 couples to shag on the beach – are very samey, and strategy can be vague. Essentially, it's about pre-empting complaints, although with some guests ecstatically happy, and others wallowing in a pit of despair when presented with identical facilities, it's often hard to know what approach to take. It's easy to end up simply obeying the constant stream of ticker tape messages at the bottom of the screen. If guests are complaining that they can't get a soft drink, then you build a soft drinks stall. If they're complaining that they can't get a decent meal, then you knock up a restaurant for the ungrateful shits; and there is an element of the game playing you rather than vice versa.

TOUCHING CLOTH

That's a perennial problem with the genre though, and *Beach Life* is certainly a quirky addition to it, with a particularly British sense of (toilet) humour. If nothing else, it ranks as the first game to mention both 'touching cloth', and 'dropping the kids off at the pool', two actions that generally occur in that order and in close proximity

HAPPY SNAPPER

NOW REMEMBER TO SEND US A POSTCARD

Zoom in on the jacuzzi action using your own camera.

"Put your top on."

No, not really.

A holiday wouldn't be a holiday without some poorly taken photographs, and *Beach Life* caters for this thanks to a somewhat incongruous Olympus endorsement. It's slightly more than an in-built screen-grabber though, enabling you to zoom in on your target, with the subsequent picture being transformed into a stylised postcard that can be posted on the Eidos website. Or not.

to each other. Just make sure you've built some bogs.

While the game doesn't do anything particularly wrong, neither does it do anything particularly new, vulgar behaviour notwithstanding. Much of the pre-release material attempted to draw comparisons with *The Sims*, but this has proven something of a red herring, as there is nothing like the level of intimacy. Granted, each holidaymaker has his or her own name, needs and desires, but finding these out is an irksome process, involving clicking on an individual and reading a series of recent thoughts via another menu system. And with hundreds of guests, many only there for a few days, there's scarcely time to nurture any kind of relationship.

In the short term, it can be mildly entertaining to target a particular guest and watch them go about their business, and this is more suited to the open-ended – and aptly named – sandbox mode, where there are no time constraints. For instance, we watched a fat bloke arrive at the resort, drop off his bags, go for a burger, then immediately go for a sit-down meal followed by a pint and another burger. Not a bad start to the holiday, in anyone's book. Observing would-be lotharios can also be amusing, as they tour from woman to woman, either being laughed off, kicked in the nuts, or led to a shady place and straddled.

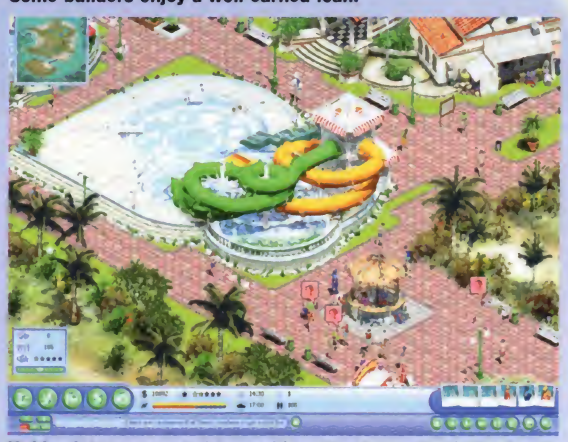
NO LIFE

If we weren't expecting more from the game it would probably have received a one-page review, the same score, and we'd have all been pleasantly surprised. Given the amount of hype over the last six months though, it's hard not to feel a tiny bit disappointed that it is nothing more than a contemporary – albeit comical rehash of an established genre. But as such, it is still more than capable of eating up huge amounts of your time. During the course of this review, I have played the game all day, every day for the best part of a week. That's mainly because I am a professional, but I am still tempted to have another look, if only to watch fat men eat.

Assuming you have less time on your hands, *Beach Life* should last you considerably longer. Even once the game has been completed, there is still plenty of scope for dabbling, if only to see what happens under various circumstances. As was Ian Livingstone's goal when he came up with the concept, it can be viewed as entertainment rather than an intense game you have to win. It's perfectly feasible to leave the game running, go for your tea, and come back to find your guests spewing their guts up, leaving you to find out why. It's this type of thing that will perversely have you coming back for more.

If nothing else, *Beach Life* is certainly a refreshing change from goblins, orcs or historical settings, and while it can never compare with the horrors of San Antonio in peak season, it runs it a close second. If you can't make it out to Ibiza this year, it could be worth a look. PCZ

Some builders enjoy a well-earned lean.



If this picture was moving, you'd see it shimmering in the heat.

"Ultimately, it's just manipulating mathematics beneath an elaborate graphical surface"

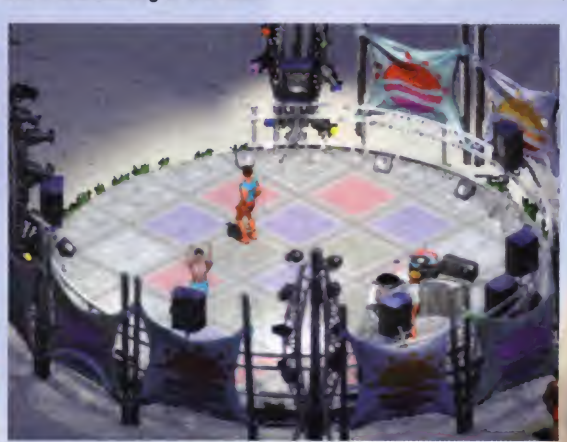
BEACH ANTHEMS

TYCOON GAME IN GOOD MUSIC SHOCKER

In the future, you'll be able to hear this screenshot.

Beach Life features an excellent and highly appropriate dance soundtrack, with a smattering of inoffensive loungecore tracks licensed from the likes of Laurent Garnier, Bent and Kinobe, with the tempo of the tunes even increasing as the game goes from day to night. However, should you tire of it – and you eventually will – you can add your own MP3s. Here's three for starters: The Sex Pistols' *Holidays In The Sun*, The Specials' *International Jet Set*, and the Ramones' *Endless Vacation*. That's more like it.

That needs a bit of work doing.



Looks like one of those new-fangled rave dances.

PCZONE VERDICT

- ✔ Contemporary setting
- ✔ Strangely engrossing
- ✔ Topless bathing
- ✔ Sexual activity
- ✘ Dated
- ✘ Repetitive

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Theme Holiday Tycoon

ICEWIND DALE II

■ £34.99 | Pub: Interplay | Dev: Black Isle | ETA: Sept 13 | http://icewind2.blackisle.com

REQUIRES PII 350, 64Mb RAM and a 4Mb 3D card **DESIRES** PIII 500, 128Mb RAM and a 16Mb 3D card

We told *Chris Anderson* the new *Icewind Dale* game was just like *Baldur's Gate II*. We lied

HOPES were high for this one before it even arrived in the office. Given the huge success of *Baldur's Gate II* we fully expected the second *Icewind Dale* game to be similar at least in terms of the sheer depth of gameplay. What we were afraid of was another relentless combat-heavy trudge through countless boring dungeons that all look similar (as was the case with the first *Icewind Dale*). In truth, Black Isle appears to have learned its lesson to an extent. *ID2* is still very combat heavy, but character interaction plays a far larger role this time round. Right from the outset, when you find yourself in the town of Targos, there are many people to question and glean information from. This is streets ahead of the NPCs in the first game, who would mutter a single sentence before offering you a quest which sent you off to kill, kill and then kill some more. NPCs in *ID2* are a lot more interesting, and the game feels less of a chore as a result.

It may not be a real looker, but *Icewind Dale II* is a vast improvement over its predecessor.

INPERSPECTIVE

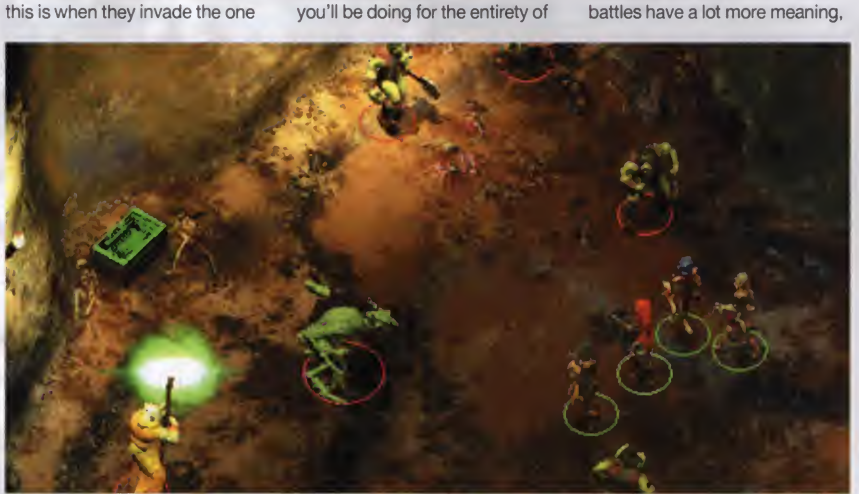
BALDUR'S GATE II
Reviewed Issue 96, Score 85%
Just about superior in every way, *BG2* sports beautiful game environments, in-depth NPC interaction and exciting and varied quests. This one's a slightly better bet if you have to choose between the two.

PLANESCAPE TORMENT
Reviewed Issue 87, Score 87%
This is still the best turn-based RPG for people who want real depth of story, and complex character development. It makes *Icewind Dale II* look vacuous by comparison.

TELLING TALES

The main storyline centres around a goblin invasion of the Ten Towns. Your first hint of this is when they invade the one you're in at the time, Targos. Throughout the game you'll be taken to different locations in the Ten Towns in an attempt to repel the goblin invasion and once more bring peace to the Spine of the World. It's as good a reason as any to go bashing goblin bonces, and that's exactly what you'll be doing for the entirety of the game. The story progresses mainly through talking to NPCs, which may be an unspectacular way of doing it, but at least it makes a change from watching endless cut-scenes and FMVs.

The core of *Icewind Dale II* is centred around combat, but thanks to the excellent NPCs, the battles have a lot more meaning,



Some of the opponents are much nastier than others. This little fella here regenerates himself while he fights, so you have to finish him off quick.

DISARM OR DIE

THEY'RE NOT DEAD, THEY'RE JUST STUNNED

Neutralising spells such as Web give you time to breathe.

It's quite often impossible to succeed in combat if you don't neutralise most of the enemy first. This is mainly due to your healers taking forever to cast each spell, meaning that half your party has dropped dead before the spell is cast (you have to wonder whose brilliant idea it was to have such long cast times for heals considering how fast the enemy comes at you). The only way to get ahead in *Icewind Dale II* is by casting Sleep, Web or Stun spells to take most of the enemy out so you can kill a couple of them at a time. If you fail to do this you will die, repeatedly.

The game begins in the city of Targos with loads of goblins kicking everyone's heads in.

Hold down the Alt key to see what loot's on the ground. Oh yeah, and then pick it up.

"Spells still have to be memorised and you have to rest every time you use them"

as there is a strong storyline behind the endless hacking and slashing that ensues everywhere you go. Once you negotiate the less than action-packed opening stages, that is.

FROM TINY ACORNS

You might be more than a little unamused with your early quests. Fetching and returning mundane items, collecting wheels and buying arrows for soldiers are just a few of the spectacularly unchallenging tasks you'll face when you first start out. It seems Black Isle wants you to get to know the entire town before actually sending you into combat. Fine if you're a beginner, but a bit of a chore when you're an expert dungeoneer, chomping at the bit to get stuck into some toe-to-toe carnage. But fear not, toe-to-toe you will be soon enough, and when you are, depending on your gameplay preferences, combat will be either reassuringly familiar or depressingly old fashioned. Yes, the action is still turn-based. However, you can play in real-time if you wish. If you wish to die that is. Spells still have to be memorised and you still have to rest every time you use them in order to relearn them (see the Some Things Never Change panel for more details). Combat is pretty hard on all your casters when you first start out, since they have very few spells at their disposal, but as they grow in strength you'll find yourself almost wholly reliant on magic, with your melee characters being thrown to the front of your group to keep enemies occupied while your spellcasters wave their wands about and cast Stun and Sleep spells to make the fights manageable. In terms of combat then, nothing much has changed from the first title.

WALKTHROUGH →

A STEP BY STEP GUIDE TO YOUR AVERAGE *ID2* MISSION

A typical quest in *Icewind Dale II* involves finding and destroying a building or enemy horde, and the further you get, the more combat intensive your adventures seem to become. Here's an idea of what to expect.

1 This is where Ubrec (head of your starting town, Targos) tells you there is an enemy fortress which needs to be taken out as part of an ongoing quest to protect the area from a goblin and orc invasion.

2 Along the way you find a friendly scout who has been injured while attempting to explore the fortress. She has lost her partner, so now you have a sub-quest to find him.

3 The entrance to the main fort is locked, but Ennelia tells you there is a secret entrance to the east. This is it, so without further ado lets venture in and see what we find.

4 Wouldn't you know it, this gate is locked, so now you have to find the key. Keys are usually found on key NPCs (no pun intended), but you have to kill them first to get them, which brings us to...

5 This is the meat of *Icewind Dale II*, relentless combat in an attempt to get an item or clear an area. No matter what you try, this is what you will always end up doing: killing stuff repeatedly.

Turn-based combat is still the only way to win. Real-time combat is a shortcut to death.

LOOKS FAMILIAR

Visually, *Icewind Dale II* is nothing to write home about, but it does the job well enough. You won't find the beautiful and wildly varied environments of *BG2*, but the graphics are clear and detailed, though playing in high resolutions reduces your group members to tiny little dots on the screen. We recommend 800x600 if you want to have any clue where your characters are at any given point. Despite the seemingly neverending sheets of white snow that blanket the land, at least the environments are more varied than in the first game, with noticeable landmarks marking your route from one place to the next. The characters in your party are clearly portrayed as well, despite their shortcomings in the size department at higher resolutions.

STACKING UP

Icewind Dale II is a highly playable RPG that's addictive if not terribly compelling, and the only real downer is the antiquated spell system and the inexplicable necessity to rest after every fight. It's not the *BG2* killer we had all hoped for and neither does it stack up to *Neverwinter Nights*.

However, there are some very well designed areas if you persevere a little, particularly the Ice Temple in Andora. Here you'll find some particularly fiendish puzzles and interesting NPCs. All of whom have a lot to say for themselves, and most of whom contribute to the development of the main plot, which although initially concentrates on the siege at Targos, eventually exposes a far greater and more sinister threat to the Ten Towns.

Anyone will admit *Icewind Dale II* is not the most original RPG you will come across. It's derivative by its very nature, but a good plot, interesting NPCs and solid combat mechanics place it head and shoulders above the lion's share of its predecessors and make it an essential purchase for all fans of the superb Black Isle RPGs. PCZ

Inventory management is a simple affair, as you can get special bags to keep similar items together.

SOME THINGS NEVER CHANGE

SPELLING OUT THE MAGIC INTERFACE

Learn a spell and then forget it as soon as you've cast it.

If you've played any of the *Baldur's Gate* or *Icewind Dale* games before, this screen will be familiar. It's the spell screen. Yes, you still have to rest to memorise all your spells, which leads you to wonder how in hell your characters can learn a spell, then instantly forget it the moment they cast it. It's idiotic in the extreme, and when you are out in the wilds and can't rest to regain your spells because you're constantly being attacked, it's worse than idiotic. It's an outright pain in the arse. *Icewind Dale II* will hopefully be the last game ever that uses this senseless and antiquated spell system.

"You won't find the beautiful and varied environments of *BG2*, but the graphics are clear and detailed"

MISSED OPPORTUNITY

TOO MUCH ICE IS BAD FOR YOU

While we fullly understand the *Icewind Dale* series is set against icy backdrops, we also believe you can take a good thing too far, and with this sequel Black Isle has done exactly that. Even halfway through the game just about every environment is totally covered in snow. A little variety wouldn't have hurt. The landscape does get slightly more varied later on and the environments do change a a wee bit, but why make us wait so long? It seems just plain lazy to use the snow tileset so liberally for vast sections of the game. It just looks so dull and monotonous that you almost want to stop playing.

PCZONE VERDICT

- ✔ Clever level design
- ✔ Interesting NPCs
- ✔ Huge gameworld
- ✘ Outrageously bad path-finding
- ✘ Average graphics
- ✘ Dated game mechanics

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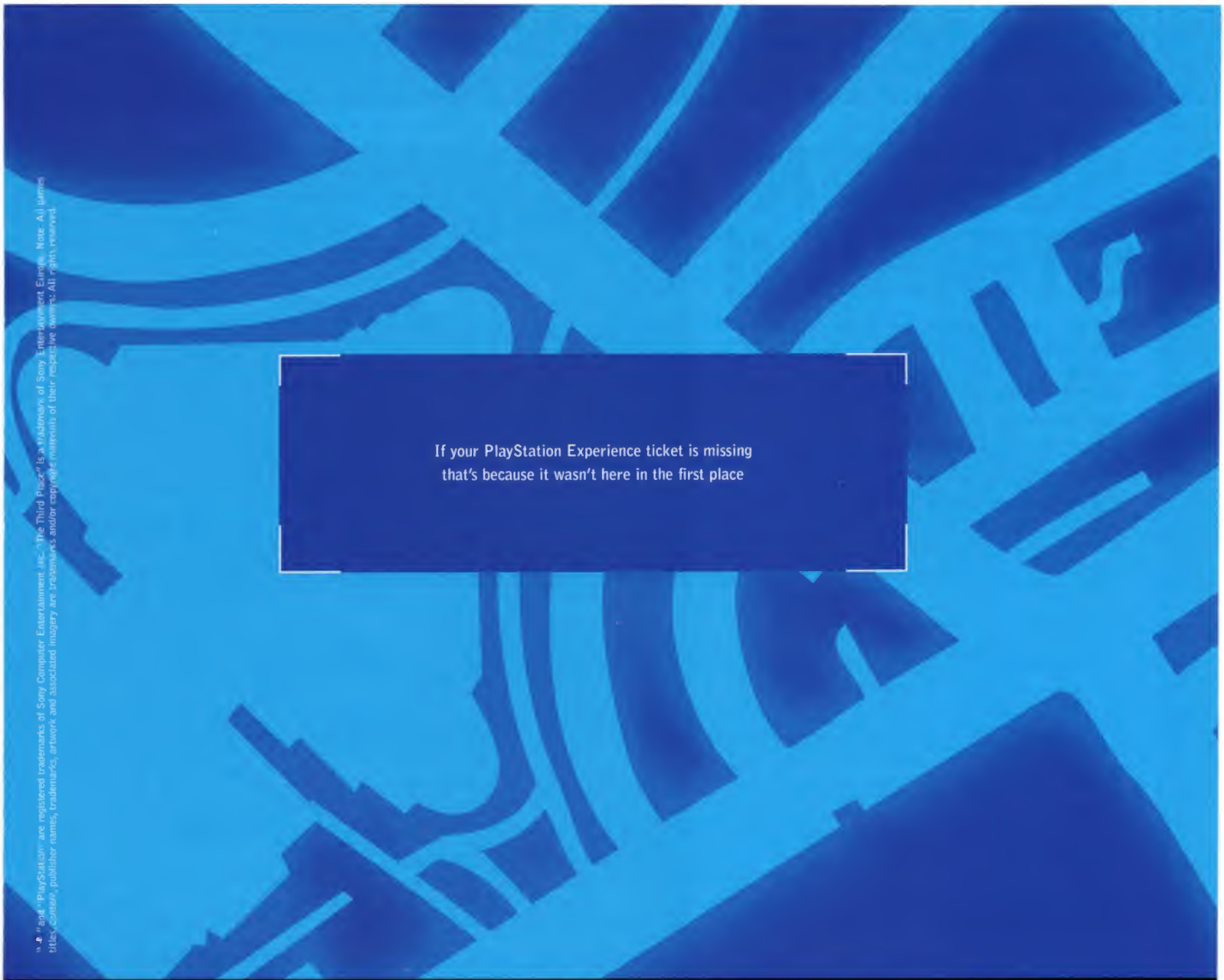
Dated game mechanics don't ruin an addictive and enjoyable game



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THE THIRD PLACE

SUDDEN STRIKE II

■ £34.99 | Pub: CDV | Dev: Fireglow | ETA: 30 August | www.suddenstrike2.de/english

REQUIRES PII 300, 64Mb RAM and an 8Mb 3D card
DESIRES PIII 600, and a 16Mb 3D card

After the surprise attack that was the original *Sudden Strike*, *Steve O'Hagan* regroups for the sequel and finds war is still swell

The units are all pretty tiny, but they're well detailed and historically accurate.

WHAT WAS WWII really like? Was it the sombre yet star-studded display of gallantry movies such as *The Longest Day* and *A Bridge Too Far* would have us believe? Or was it the grim, bloody, tooth-and-nail melee films like *Saving Private Ryan* and *Enemy At The Gates* depict? According to *Sudden Strike II*, it was neither.

This is the war we learnt about from *Commando* and *Warlord* comics. The war where a lone Tommy could charge through enemy lines, blow up a couple of tanks and take the enemy general prisoner, before blasting his way back to friendly territory. A war where the action never stops and explosions rain thick and fast, sending soldiers flying through the air screaming 'Aiiiiieeeeee' as they go. In short, it's war for fun. Which is probably the way it should be as far as games are concerned.

Sudden Strike came out of nowhere last year and took the games charts by storm. The WWII setting was novel for the RTS genre, and the game's emphasis on action without having to think about collecting resources was enough to persuade people to overlook the fact that in many other ways it was hardly dissimilar to the majority of other RTSs.

"*Sudden Strike 2* doesn't really look any different to how you remember its forerunner"

Sudden Strike II lets you play as either the Germans, Russians, Americans, Japanese or the Brits. Each nationality has its own single-player campaign based around historical battles such as the British Airborne landings at Arnhem and the American crossing of the Rhine. There are also a stack of one-off missions, but sadly no single-player skirmish generator.

Each side has its own unique units, and hardware buffs should dust off their identification manuals as the massive range of vehicles in the game are all modelled on their historical counterparts.

AMASS AMMO, ATTACK

Out on the battlefield, as with its predecessor, *Sudden Strike II*'s major departure from the RTS norm is its lack of traditional resource management. In order to fight a battle you don't first need to chop down a bunch of trees, dig up a load of iron and construct a base to build your army. The only thing you need to worry about here is keeping your units supplied with ammo. And fortunately, crates of the stuff are to be found lying about the battlefields, which your troops can either grab for themselves or you can get a truck to haul it up to the front lines for them.

Visually, despite many slight improvements to the engine, *SS2* doesn't really look any different to how you remember its forerunner. The explosions may belch more fire and the buildings may be

INPERSPECTIVE

COMMANDOS 2
Reviewed Issue 108 Score 91%
Also set in WWII, *Commandos 2* is more for those who prefer to sneak around with a handful of men rather than send entire battalions to their deaths.

COSSACKS: EUROPEAN WARS
Reviewed Issue 101 Score 89%
Also from CDV, it's another historically based RTS with stacks of units on-screen at any given time.

Make your guns cover the roads and occupy the houses with your troops for a strong defence.

more varied and detailed, but to be blunt, it looks pretty much identical.

The map is still drawn from the isometric top-down viewpoint we're used to from the dawn of RTS gaming, covering everything from the winter snowscapes of Russia, to the dense forests of Northern Germany and the sandy beaches and lush jungles of South Pacific islands.

SMALL SOLDIERS

The units are all fairly well drawn and remind you of those little plastic Airfix soldiers, tanks and planes we used to play with as kids. And when the action kicks off, it's exactly the exciting maelstrom you imagined as you rolled marbles into the ranks of your little Matchbox men. Tanks spurting machine gun and cannon fire, artillery shells bursting all around, waves of infantry mown down by HMG emplacements as huge bombers drone overhead, pursued by the puffs of smoke sent up by your flak guns. It's hardly going to stretch your graphics card, but it does the job nicely.

Air units periodically become available, which you can use to drop bombs, paratroops and even propaganda leaflets to persuade your foe to pack it in and come over to your side.

MISSED OPPORTUNITY

SMALL SOLIDERS NEED A BIG INTERFACE

A few things that come to mind, but in a game of this scale with this many units, some kind of formation system would have been welcome. You have a group of infantry, tanks and mortars, and instead of just telling them to move forward at the same speed, wouldn't it be nice if you could hit an 'attack' or 'defend' option where the infantry would fan out in front of the armour instead of trundling towards the enemy in an amorphous mob? Or maybe you could hit 'defend' and the infantry would all take cover in woods and buildings and the tanks would cover the roads instead of them all milling around in full view in the town square.

"*Sudden Strike 2* has the feel of a patched add-on pack"

TACTICAL WITHDRAWL

ANOTHER RTS WITH PLENTY OF REAL-TIME AND NOT ENOUGH STRATEGY

Batties are decided by who can see the furthest.

In its favour, if there's one tactic that won't work in *Sudden Strike II* it's the good-old tank rush. But though a more considered approach is needed, it doesn't mean success in *SS2* revolves around a Sun Tzu-like appreciation of the art of war.

Victory is largely decided by how far your units can see. If you can see your enemy but he can't see you, you can bombard him with impunity. Trouble is, your powerful weapons such as artillery and tanks can fire for miles although they can only spot targets that are relatively close. So get troops up in the church tower, or position an officer with his binoculars in the cover of some trees to do the spotting for them, and suddenly you can deliver carnage to your enemy without him having the faintest clue as to where it came from. Most battles are decided this way.

Naval units appear in the form of troop transports and cruisers, and armoured trains make sporadic appearances when they're least expected. Sounds familiar.

But there is a problem with all this. The men are damn small. And often, finding the right guy at the right time can be vital. There you are, with more than a hundred soldiers under your command. One of them is your general. There is no hotkey to select him. You can't tell what he looks like. He might be in a building. He might be taking cover behind a tree. Oh shit! He was in that clump of blokes you sent to attack that bunker. Now he's dead and it's game over.

Considering the amount of micromanagement necessary to keep your troops alive, this miniaturisation is often less than welcome. Winning firefights can depend on you calling in your long-range artillery at the right time, getting your engineer to lay some mines before the enemy tanks arrive, ordering your truck to unload its anti-tank gun in time to fire or selecting your officer in time for him to spot the enemy bazookas with his binoculars. It becomes so hard to lift your head from the intricate micro-management necessary to keep your forces alive that when it comes to the bigger picture, you can't see the wood for the trees.

CASUALTIES OF WAR

Reinforcements are frequently available depending on you securing key objectives and enemy guns and vehicles can be captured and crewed by your

Taking the high ground is always a good idea in these games.

Artillery can fire across half the map, hitting enemy forces from out of nowhere.

"Missions can run into hours as you inch across maps"

Control strategic areas to receive reinforcements.

own men. And boy do you need them. This, along with all the careful marshalling and micromanaging of your precious men, enforces a methodical approach on you, meaning the missions can run into hours as you inch across maps, sniffing out ammunition supplies and new equipment.

This isn't helped by the fact that working out what you have to do next can be a pain in the arse due to the lack of an objectives checklist. Your mission might be to defend a bridge. You do that. For about an hour. The enemy has apparently given up. But the 'Victory' screen just won't appear. Infuriating.

Despite the developer's boasts, *Sudden Strike 2* neither looks nor plays realistically. The maps bear no resemblance to the places they are supposed to, the weapons don't work realistically, and the types of forces involved in the battles are nothing like the historical reality. None of which is a bad thing. Just like the toy soldier battles we used to have, this is a game after all. And when was the last time a realistic strategy title gained any real popularity among mainstream gamers? The demise of the *Close Combat* series and the difficulty the makers of *Combat Mission* had in getting a distributor demonstrate this.

WHEN THE SMOKE CLEARS

Despite a host of tweaks and corrections such as the inclusion of difficulty levels and the ability to order groups of units to move at the same speed, *SS2* has the feel of a patched add-on pack. Enemy AI is still practically non-existent, with groups of soldiers hanging around smoking as your artillery bursts all around, and the only enemy 'attacks' being the ones scripted in the scenarios.

The first game had nothing to live up to as it was a bolt from the blue, but that's not the case anymore. And to be brutal, it looks like the designers found their laurels a little too comfortable, choosing to rest on them when they should have been pushing *Sudden Strike* forward. And in war, complacency is the number one enemy. PCZ

THE BATTLE RAGES ON

LET'S FACE IT: WORLD WAR TWO SELLS

***Windtalkers* starring Nicolas Cage is the latest WWII flick.**

Just like '70s flares and '80s pop it seems WWII has come back into fashion. Since *Saving Private Ryan* hit cinemas in 1998 there's been a glut of big-screen battle-busters from the chin-scratching *The Thin Red Line* to the tub-thumping *U-571*. All of which led to the mega-budget *Band Of Brothers* occupying our TVs for a few months last year. The bestseller lists have been conquered too, with the likes of Anthony Beevor's books *Stalingrad* and *Berlin* both hogging the top slots for months on end. So the current vogue for Nazi-bashing videogames should come as no surprise. Just think *Medal Of Honor*, *Hidden & Dangerous*, *Commandos* and more recently the *Sudden Strike* series, to name but a few. And the list of forthcoming titles is longer than the Wehrmacht's retreat from Stalingrad. Think *Battlefield 1942*, *Prisoner Of War*, *Combat Mission 2*, *GI Combat*, *Hidden & Dangerous 2*, and any number of flight sims and strategy titles. For us, the war may never be over.

Neutralise enemy flak before calling in air support.

PCZONE VERDICT

- ✔ Crazy amount of units
- ✔ There's no fiddling around with resources
- ✔ Massive WWII battles
- ✘ Nothing new here
- ✘ Your troops are tiny
- ✘ Micromanagement heavy

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Same old *Sudden Strike* – fun but flawed

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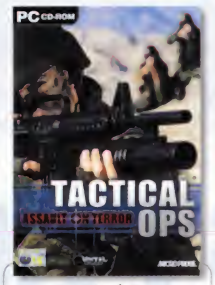

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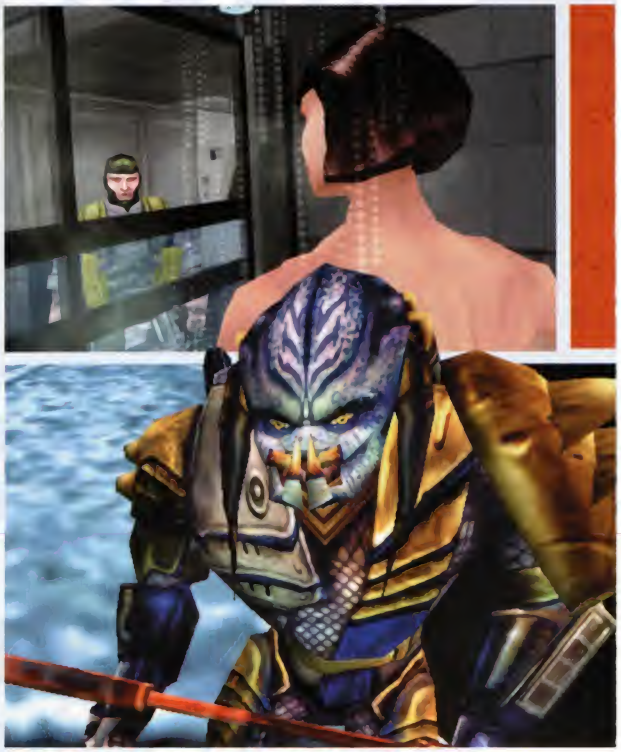
The action starts to heat up very early on in the game.



"I knew I should have worn a brace as a child."

ALIENS VS PREDATOR 2: PRIMAL HUNT

REQUIRES ORIGINAL ALIENS VS PREDATOR 2

■ £19.99 | Pub: VU Games | Dev: Third Law Interactive | ETA: August 22 | www.vugames.com

REQUIRES PII 450, 96Mb RAM (128Mb for Windows 2000 and XP), a 16Mb 3D card and the original version of *AvP2* **DESIRES** PIII 800, 128Mb RAM and a 32Mb 3D card

***Martin Korda* goes feral in the first expansion pack for Monolith's classic shooter**

OH DEAR, oh dear, oh dear. And it was all sounding so promising. Three new sets of interlocking missions they claimed, which would capture the essence of the original *AvP2* and answer the questions about the mysterious artefact from that very game, the one which gives the bearer control over the acid-filled alien hordes. New weapons, new enemies. This was to be it. The rekindling of the love affair I shared with *AvP2*, the game I gave my heart to last Christmas, but one to which I lost far more. Intestines, liver, spleen, kidneys and a windpipe if I remember correctly. Oh yeah and bladder (control). The single most terrifying game ever and I were once again to be reunited, entwined in a frenzied bond of blown off limbs and melted skin (I usually have to pay a kind lady from Kings Cross for that sort of thing), screams of child-like fear and an endless barrage of shouted expletives as dead bodies swim in a vat of blood. Yes it was all looking so promising when I was told what to expect from *AvP2*'s first expansion pack, *Primal Hunt*. So just where did it all go so horribly wrong?

Well, let's start at the beginning, which apparently, is a very good place to start. Just like before, you get to play through three campaigns, human, Predator, and in a very slight twist, Predalien. Each of these contains three missions, which in an attempt to emulate *AvP2*, interlock to form one overall picture. However, try as it might to copy the best elements of its bigger sister, *Primal Hunt* fails in almost every way. The loser!

IN PERSPECTIVE

ALIENS VS PREDATOR 2
Reviewed Issue 110, Score 93%
A terrifying masterpiece, the three campaigns are as thrilling as they are varied. No shooter fan should be without it.

DIE HARD NAKATOMI PLAZA
Reviewed Issue 117, Score 74%
Same price, but about three times as long and much more entertaining than *Primal Hunt*. If you've got 20 notes going spare, it's well worth the investment.

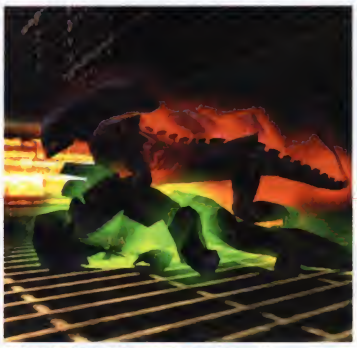
OH THE INHUMANITY

Having played as the so-called good guy in *AvP2* (a heroic looking marine with an American accent and a jaw you could forge metal on), here you play an apparently evil Corporate soldier called Dunya, with a Russian accent and breasts like a pair of giant traffic cones. At least that's what they look like in the shower-scene intro thanks to the Lithtech engine's slightly suspect character rendering. Still, could come in handy if she wants to reserve a parking space for her APC. Eh-hem, right, where was I? Oh yes, while showering, you're called away mid-lather to go and find the alien-controlling artefact in some ancient underground ruins, leaving your boyfriend Dimitri cupping his balls in frustration in anticipation of your return.

Tragically, the Corporate missions are about as subtle as a kick in the furry spheres. Within a minute of the first mission, you're swamped by legions of aliens. No suspense. No tension. Just action. And that's how it continues. There are no puzzles to solve, just a few levers to pull and loads of aliens to shoot, and while they do crawl up walls to rake at your eyes more ferociously than a slapping wife whose just found out her husband's been banging her sister, the lack of suspense and failure to capture the fear of *AvP2* through erratic lighting and clever use of sound, makes the whole affair less gripping than a leper's hand. The final mission is superb though, and will have you

Aliens will crawl along walls in order to get at you.

Failing in theatre auditions can be a painful experience.



"Hey helmet head. Over here."

A reunion with my college roommate.

unloading every round from your arsenal as you battle for dear life. Also, all three missions are monumentally difficult on the higher levels and will give even the most hardened alien-slaughterer an exhilarating challenge, due to the sheer numbers and toughness of the enemies.

PREDATORY SKILLS

So on to the Predator campaign. What a joke this one is. Apparently the most important campaign of the three in terms of storyline, it turns out to be little more than a pathetically cobbled together set of substandard missions, gelled weakly with some ill-thought-out and uninspired cut-scenes. Watching a bunch of predators waving at each other incomprehensively, looking like they're having their first stretch of the morning instead of mapping out an essential mission to liberate a priceless artefact, then running off in random directions and leaving you with a sidekick who gets stuck behind a pebble does not, in my estimation, constitute a gripping plot. In fact, I'd argue it doesn't even constitute an un-gripping one. The missions aren't much better either. Three new indigenous alien species consisting of a giant cow, a rock creature and a mutated ankle-biting worm make cameo appearances, but they can all be dispatched with the minimum of effort. Once again, puzzles are a nonentity and it's not long before the whole campaign degenerates into a simplistic corridor-based shooter. By the end of the three missions, the limp-wristed plot actually answers fewer questions than Thribbletwat College For the Dropped at Birth would if they entered University Challenge. Oh yes, I nearly forgot, the Predator's much vaunted new weapon – the wrist laser – is so effective, you won't even bother using its other weapons. Dull, dull, dull!

ALIEN TO ME

Which leaves us with the Predalien missions, which sadly, aren't too great either. Generally it's just a case of finding the right vent to crawl through, while mincing endless droves of humans and a couple of predators into meaty strands. However, it's not all bad, and the predator confrontations are harder than a kilted Scot jogging during a highland storm. While wearing no pants. Or shoes. Yes, that hard. But ultimately, the three missions are still overly scripted, bugged and again, lacking in tension or thrills.

So quite bleak then compared to *AvP2*? But when you think the last notable thing developer Third Law Interactive did was an average FPS based on a bunch of make-up wearing rockers, perhaps it's not a surprise that *PH* is as unspectacular and predictable as it is. Had Monolith (developer of *AvP2*) been behind this, it would surely have been infinitely better. As it is, apart from a few frantic and hellishly hard human missions, the rest of the package only just bobs its ugly head above the mire of averageness. For £20 you could buy the far superior and much more entertaining *Die Hard: Nakatomi Plaza*. Either that or you could simply re-ignite your love affair with the brilliant *AvP2*. In fact, that's exactly what I'm going to do now, and to hell with the woman from Kings Cross. She was too expensive anyway... PCZ

AVP3 WISH LIST

We all want to play as the alien queen.

HERE ARE A FEW THINGS WE'D LIKE TO SEE IN *AVP3*. COO THAT RHYMES AND EVERYTHING

1: Continuous blood trails from the Predator when it's wounded (until it heals itself), so that you can track it even when it's invisible.

2: More human versus Predator confrontations when playing as the human. The ability to cover yourself in copious amounts of mud and cobble together an inventive array of weaponry from leaves, twigs and berries in order to defeat your vastly superior foe which is armed with cutting edge technology (like Arnie in Predator) would also be an interesting feature. Actually, forget that last one.

3: Working as part of a team of aliens rather than on your own, being able to play as the alien queen and having a greater array of alien mutations to fight against. Yeah, that'll do.

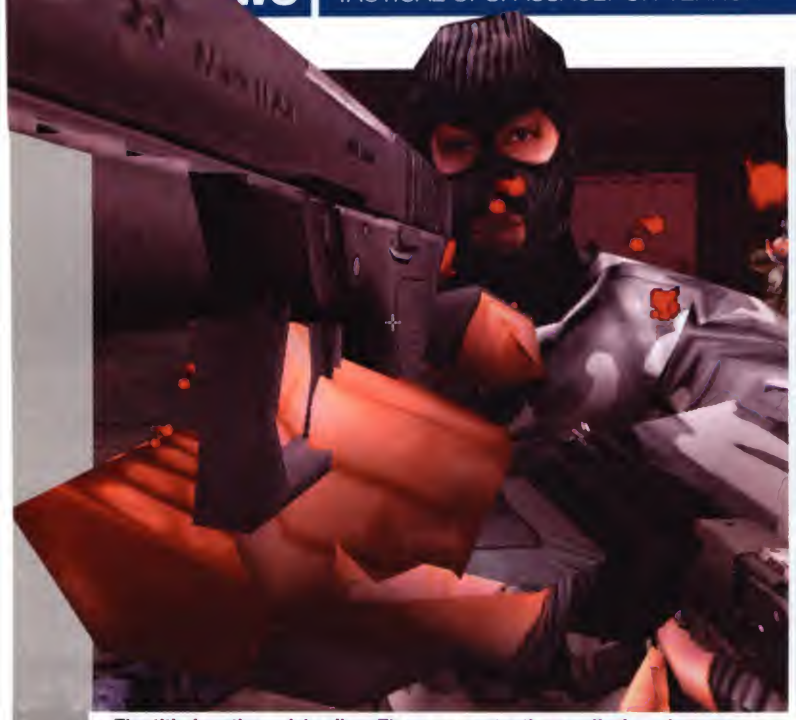
"Within a minute of the first mission, you're swamped by legions of aliens"

PCZONE VERDICT

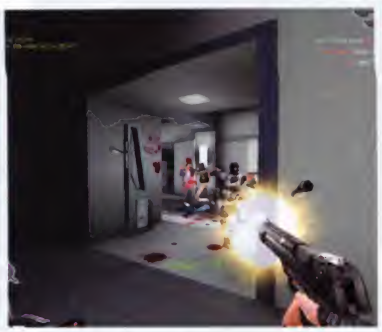
- ✔ Cheap
- ✔ Frantic and challenging human missions
- ✘ Crap Predator campaign
- ✘ Very bugged
- ✘ Repetitive
- ✘ Less scary than my gran

64

A shadow of the beast it could have been



The title is rather misleading. There are no tactics on display whatsoever.



Watch out for version 3.1.9 on a forthcoming cover disc.

TACTICAL OPS: ASSAULT ON TERROR

■ £19.99 | Pub: Infogrames | Dev: Kamehan Studios | ETA: August 30 | www.tactical-ops.to

REQUIRES P200, 64Mb RAM and an 8Mb 3D card **DESIRES** PIII 450, 128 RAM and a 16Mb 3D card

Why download a free mod when you can pay 20 quid for it, asks *Mark Hill?*

IT'S A tough choice, we know. On the one hand you can dust off your copy of *Unreal Tournament* and install one of its most popular mods (cover mounted a couple of issues ago). On the other you could lay down two crisp tenners on your local shop's counter and get the standalone product. It boils down to this: do you want to be robbed blind or don't you?

Tactical Ops is no more than an average, watered-down and slightly more arcadey alternative to *Counter-Strike*, with the advantage of *UT*'s bots to add some single-player action. But there's something extremely cynical and opportunistic about boxing it and putting it on the shelves. Sticking in some extra maps doesn't change the fact that you'll be playing exactly the same game that everyone who got it for free is playing. And how stupid will you feel when all your team-mates find out you've been suckered?

"This is just a toned-down *Counter-Strike* rip-off, without the strategy or tense action"

UNTACTICAL OPS

The premise of *Tactical Ops* is familiar enough: choose between terrorists and counter-terrorists, buy your weapons, rescue the hostages, plant the bomb. There are a few new ideas, of course. You can collect drug packets for extra cash and pick up the wallets from fallen players, while the terrorists' voices have been given an insultingly stereotypical Hispanic accent.

The fact remains that this is just a toned-down *Counter-Strike* rip-off, with none of *CS*'s strategy or tense action. In a sense, it's the same old *Unreal Tournament* team deathmatch with realistic weapons, rather poor maps and standard military skins. There's no attempt at realism – except for the annoying, instagib-like death-by-bullet-grazing – and you can't even issue orders to your bots, which is something you could do in the original.

Another thing: don't expect these bots to recreate any sort of online experience either. They run to their target, shoot anything that stands in their way and get killed. That's about it.

DON'T BE STUPID

Counter-Strike got away with being boxed-up for retail for the simple reason that it's a slice of gaming genius and it came bundled with several other mods. It's also a completely separate entity to *Half-Life*, it's the most popular online shooter ever and we bloody love it.

We can't even recommend the new maps from this boxed version, since they're mostly boxy, ugly and unbalanced affairs. And you can bet the *TO* online community – which is sizeable enough – won't be playing any of them.

If you don't own a copy of *Unreal Tournament*, here's what you should do. Buy it for a tenner, enjoy one of the best multiplayer shooters available and download (or install from our discs) dozens of free mods, one of which will probably be *Tactical Ops*.

Your weapons will be bulletless within seconds.

INPERSPECTIVE

COUNTER-STRIKE
Reviewed Issue 118, Score 86%
Still the top online shooter and still as popular as ever, even if cheats have left most of us disillusioned with it.

GLOBAL OPS
Reviewed Issue 114, Score 78%
A decent alternative, with some good ideas that don't really come together as well as they could.

PCZONE VERDICT

- ✔ Fast action
- ✔ Clean interface
- ✘ New maps are rubbish
- ✘ You can get it for free
- ✘ No tactics
- ✘ Bots are useless

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Pure terrorism

WE'LL TAKE YOU THERE

evo

THE PERFORMANCE CAR MAGAZINE

ON SALE NOW

At least you can play as the SAS. Not that it makes a blinding bit of difference.

There's a massive online community to play with if you can stand the graphics.

DELTA FORCE: TASK FORCE DAGGER

■ £19.99 | Pub: Novalogic | Dev: Zombie Studios | ETA: Out Now | www.novalogic.com

REQUIRES PII 266, 64Mb RAM and a 4Mb 3D card **DESIRES** Will chug with anything less than a PII 400 with 128Mb RAM and a 16Mb 3D card

A stand-alone expansion for an 18-month-old game? *Mark Hill* smells a rat

WE'VE NEVER totally understood the popularity of *Delta Force* as a single-player experience. While the perpetual production line of Sim games is bought by casual gamers to play between bouts of *Solitaire*, the *Delta Force* series presumably has its fanbase among lovers of hardcore sim shooters. And they really should be more discerning.

It might have moved on from the eye-grating voxels of previous instalments (although the terrain is still rendered that way), but the 3D engine – already piss-poor 18 months ago – can only be described as disgraceful. And the gameplay certainly doesn't make up for it. It's a vacuous succession of base infiltration missions against the most idiotic enemies you'll ever encounter.

ENDURING NAUSEA

If you've never sampled the lack of delights that is a *Delta Force* single-player game, it's best described as a poor man's *Project IGI*. And *Task Force Dagger* is nothing less than an atrocious and near criminal stand-alone expansion pack for *DF: Land Warrior*, designed to cash-in on the recent war in Afghanistan.

However, while the AI and general feel of *TFD* have nothing to do with reality, the selection of accurately recreated weapons do manage to save it from total catastrophe. Everything from the animations to the terrain and level design screams cardboard shoddiness.

Where *Ghost Recon*'s sand-filled add-on pack *Desert Siege* turned dunes into lush battlefields, *Task Force Dagger* offers you endless plateaus of textureless beige. But you really have to see it in action to realise how bad it looks. Also the third-person view is less than useless.

We saw Kandahar on the telly. It didn't look like this.

> **"You can't simply point at an enemy half a mile away and expect to hit them first time"**

MULTIPLE AIMS

As ever, it's the multiplayer side of things that helps to warrant you spending your money. So long as you're playing on a server filled with players. Otherwise you just end up wandering for ages through vast areas of nothingness, before spotting an enemy 12 sandbanks away and falling dead to the floor if you don't hit them first.

Targetting is made harder and more realistic by weather conditions and accurate bullet physics, meaning you can't simply point at an enemy half a mile away and expect to hit them first time, which adds considerably to the challenge of the game.

Sadly though, the multiplayer games don't detract from the fact that this is simply exploiting a conflict that is still far too fresh in people's memories to be turned into any form of entertainment. It also falls short in the graphics and AI department, which are appalling. The forthcoming *Delta Force: Black Hawk Down* may deserve to be as successful as past chapters in the series, but if this tops the charts they'll be boxing camel shit and putting it on the shelves next.

INPERSPECTIVE

GHOST RECON: DESERT SIEGE
Reviewed Issue 116, Score 89%
Shows what expansions should be like and provides the looks, tactics and tension that *DF* lacks.

PROJECT IGI
Reviewed Issue 97, Score 85%
A great base-infiltrating game that also offers massive areas, but is a lot more fun.

PCZONE VERDICT

- ✔ Lots of realistic weapons
- ✔ Great in multiplayer
- ✘ Extraordinarily poor AI
- ✘ Appalling visuals
- ✘ Repetitive missions
- ✘ Opportunistic tripe

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Operation Enduring Rip-Off

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SVEN-GÖRAN ERIKSSON'S WORLD CHALLENGE

■ £19.99 | Pub: Ubi Soft | Dev: Anco | ETA: Out Now

REQUIRES P233, 64Mb RAM and an 8Mb 3D card **DESIRES** PII 400, 128Mb RAM and a 16Mb 3D card

Steve Hill in rubbish football game shocker

Not the tightest marking we've ever seen.

A few new faces in the England line-up.

The replays are tolerable.

DEPENDING on whether you read the magazine backwards or forwards, you may have already chanced upon this issue's (hard but fair) review of *Sven-Göran Eriksson's World Manager*. There's no need for a double-take, as this is its equally shoddy counterpart, with the word 'Manager' cunningly supplanted by 'Challenge' – although the greatest challenge is in actually deciding which is the worse game.

Whereas *Manager* involves mindlessly watching a shoddy match engine, *Challenge* allows you to pick up your pad and play what appears to be an amalgam of every rubbish Anco football game ever made (and there's been a few). Unresponsive at best, unplayable at worst, it's a dismal experience that compared to the cream of modern football games is almost unrecognisable as a representative of the genre.

What Sven was thinking of (the money?) in endorsing such muck, we don't know. Compared to this though, his pasta sauce advert seems dignified. Other than his pensive face on the box, the Sven licence offers no authenticity whatsoever, and for all the difference it makes it might as well be endorsed by Ulrika Jonsson.

In addition to the ropy graphics, negligible sound and erratic control, they haven't even got the decency to include real player names or tournaments, something of a farce considering that this was released solely to cash in on England's short-lived World Cup aspirations. Aimed squarely at the mug punter, anyone who buys this deserves all they get.

PCZONE VERDICT 20

Cheap and nasty

VALHALLA CHRONICLES

■ £14.99 | Pub: Koch Media | Dev: Paradox Entertainment | ETA: Out Now

REQUIRES P200, 64Mb RAM and a 4Mb 3D card **DESIRES** P II 300 and 128Mb RAM

When is an RPG not an RPG? We don't know, but *Chris Anderson* does

Average graphics, awful game.

***Morrowind*, your days are not numbered.**

THE REALMS of Norse mythology set the premise for a game that claims to be a role-playing game in one sense and a classic adventure game in another. In reality, it's neither. Taking control of a hero and embarking upon quests in an attempt to save the world from Ragnarok (Armageddon in Norse mythology), is the order of the day. However, instead of engaging with Armageddon, it might be more fun trying to destroy the *Valhalla Chronicles* CD instead. Yes, that's how good this game is.

A flat 2D gameworld in which many of the objects you need to find are too small to see, doesn't get *VC* off to a good start, but the laughable dialogue trees you're given when interacting with characters confirm early suspicions that *VC* is not destined to become a *PC ZONE* Classic. Further securing the game's place in the RPG hall of infamy are some massively bugged quests, a very basic hack-and-slash combat system (hold the control key, click on your opponent and watch them fight it out) and an absence of the role-playing elements alluded to both in the manual and on the official website. Oh yes, this one's a real stinker and there's no mistaking it.

PCZONE VERDICT 25

Chronic

MICRO COMMANDOS

■ £29.99 | Pub: Monte Cristo Games | Dev: Monte Cristo Games | ETA: Out Now

REQUIRES PII 300, 64Mb RAM and a 16Mb 3D card **DESIRES** PIII 900GHz, 128Mb RAM and a 32Mb 3D card

***Keith Pullin* bigs it up in this very little RTS**

Dog's dinner anyone? The fun part is carrying off the leftovers you know.

For trained killers these commandos sleep a surprising amount.

THERE'S an abundance of rank RTS games on the PC and it gives us huge displeasure to announce that *Micro Commandos* is one of them. Tiny aliens are invading Earth and to survive they must collect discarded human food, materials and energy to advance through a nondescript house and locate the ultimate weapon.

As usual with Monte Cristo, there's an element of tongue-in-cheek humour, with an attempt to inject a bit of fun into proceedings. Unfortunately, as is the case with most of their games, the surreal French humour travels about as well as their national football team.

What is intended as witty and possibly satirical ultimately becomes juvenile, irritating and nonsensical. This idiocy then manages to seep into every pore of the game. The graphics exude a kind of nouveau melted-marshmallow style where everything looks the same; the interface is an embarrassment and the gameplay is non-existent – unless you count picking up rubbish as wholesome, bona-fide entertainment, which is pretty much what this game is all about.

Now while a lot of good honest people do pick up litter (not including the ones who get paid to do it), it's never actually classed as fun. For anybody to think that this admittedly dutiful act could form the basis of a rip-roaring RTS action game is somewhat bewildering.

If you're a Womble the fact that *Micro Commandos* is one of the biggest piles of rubbish we've ever seen will probably excite you. For everybody else? Well, it's just gargbage.

PCZONE VERDICT 13

Massively poor

SVEN-GÖRAN ERIKSSON'S WORLD MANAGER

■ £19.99 | Pub: Ubi Soft | ETA: Out Now

Taking a penalty on a green tartan blanket.

Shearer can't be tempted out of retirement.

IMAGINE if you bought a pair of kecks and found that they had a great big hole in the arse. You'd be livid, and rightly demand your money back. That's how unwitting purchasers of this tawdry cash-in will feel, as it is to all intents and purposes, broken. Conspicuously absent from the reviews schedule at time of release, it is comfortably as bad as feared.

An international management game was never going to be an obvious success, and much of the gameplay involves waiting for the next match of a fictional England World Cup qualifying campaign to come around. When it does, it's a shambolic effort that further increases developer Anco's reputation for mediocrity. Riddled with bugs, it's a pitiful mess, and Sven ought to be ashamed of himself. (***SH***)

PCZONE VERDICT 15

Yes, it really is as dull as it looks.

AIRLINE TYCOON

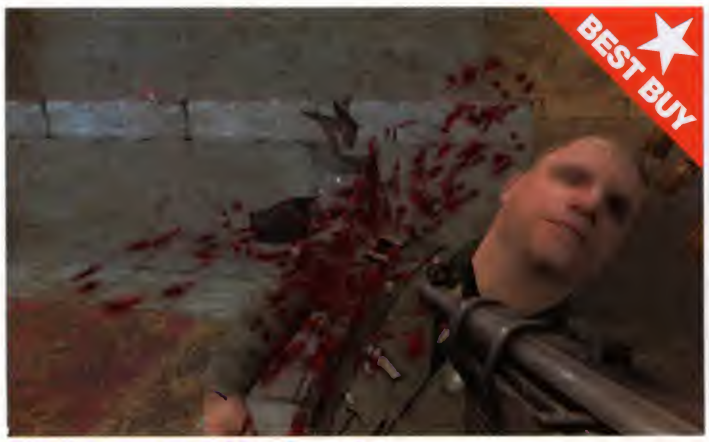
■ £19.99 | Pub: Monte Cristo | ETA: Out Now

WHO'S HAD enough of tycoon games? Well if you're not sick of the sight of them yet, you sure will be once you've played this. At the start of the game you pick one of four characters who run airline companies from an office in an airport. The overall aim is to keep your company running smoothly. This can be done by either making deals with clients and distributors (petrol, food and so on) over the phone, or by walking around the airport and dealing with these conveniently situated people face to face. As if this wasn't boring and infuriating enough, your best planes, which you can construct yourself, seem to be constantly grounded by bad weather. If you have a six-year-old child then maybe they'll find some enjoyment in *AT*'s patronising, dull, repetitive and overly simplistic gameplay. You on the other hand, will not. Maybe one day we'll see a decent airline tycoon game. Sadly, though, it's not today. (***MK***)

PCZONE VERDICT 37

REPLAY

The place to go when you're low on dough



"What did you do that for? It really hurt."

RETURN TO CASTLE WOLFENSTEIN

■ £19.99 | Pub: Activision | ETA: Out Now

THOUGH a major hit, *Return To Castle Wolfenstein* was, compared to *Medal Of Honor*, generally a disappointment, certainly in terms of the single-player game. That's not to say *Wolfenstein*'s fantasy spin on Nazi Germany's dealings in the occult wasn't immense fun while it lasted. Head-to-head against *MOH*'s gritty realism and intelligence however, *RTCW*'s arcade roots felt all the more prominent and even a little dated underneath the shine of the graphics.

Bloody-nosed from the first encounter, *RTCW* is now bigger and better, not to mention considerably cheaper than its rival. In short, *Medal Of Honor* remains our favourite WWII first-person shooter, although the gap between the two has narrowed. What was a highly recommended game is now almost an absolute must buy, partly due to the new price, but mostly due to the immense success of the multiplayer game since release. But there's much more to this package than a 'Reduced' sticker.

What you get over and above the standard-issue game are some excellent new multiplayer maps (some of which rival the original's high-quality ones), as well as some tools to create your own. There's also an interesting insight into the game's creation, and a bunch of artwork you'll probably never look at. Of course, there's very little here for seasoned veterans to warrant the outlay, especially since the new maps have been released as a free download, but at least there's a copy of the original pre-*Doom Wolfenstein 3D* for those who missed the game that started the whole FPS genre off in the first place.

Richie Shoemaker

PCZONE VERDICT **89**

At just 20 quid, this little gem is a real bargain.

Still an office favourite, even after all these years.

QUAKE III GOLD

■ £19.99 | Pub: Activision | ETA: Out Now

GAMES = FUN, or at least that's the idea. But when we play *Quake III* in the office the result is invariably over-heated arguments and smashed equipment. It has also led to one near-disciplinary procedure (I thought our publisher had gone home) and a very real threat of violence when Holden, our Aussie news editor, looked like he was going to vault the desk and throttle me. Even Korda, one of the calmest people in the office, has been forced to retire from play after an incident involving his phone and hard drive. *Quake III* isn't fun, but it's pure, addictive and on-the-edge entertainment for those with reflexes as keen as a 12-year-old on amphetamines. And, although it's now enjoying life as a senior citizen of the gaming world, *Quake III: Arena* is still the best deathmatch tool in the world.

It's been criticised by some as not being a game, just an engine with guns, but that's just crazy talk from crazy people. It might not be as popular online as *Counter-Strike*, and it's not as complete a package as *Unreal Tournament*, but it's the only game that we've played religiously for more than 30 months without having to resort to different game modes or mods. Just as well, as id hasn't embraced any community offerings and the only extra in the Gold box is a copy of the official add-on *Team Arena*, which, for the record, we didn't like very much.

Dave Woods

PCZONE VERDICT **84**

CODENAME: OUTBREAK

■ £4.99 | Pub: Sold Out | ETA: Out Now

It may look ugly, but under the visuals lies a great game. Honest.

MANY PEOPLE laughed when, back in issue 107, I awarded *Codename: Outbreak* a very respectable 80 per cent. Big hearty laughs, with tears streaming down their ignorant faces. That is until they fired the game up, waded past the tedious first five missions and experienced the true excellence of a first-person shooter graced with some of the best AI yet seen in the genre. Don't believe me? Well, shell out the five measly quid they're asking for this gem and see for yourself. The graphics may look like the random scribblings of a thumbless toddler, and it may have only sold about six copies (including the three bought by the development team), but lying behind the ugly visuals is a superb squad-based shooter that requires as much brain power as it does reflexes. Better still, you and a friend can play through the whole single-player campaign as a team. The story is a mix between *Predator* and *Aliens* and developer, GSC (also responsible for the brilliant *Cossacks: European Wars*) has borrowed heavily from both. However, despite the lack of originality, you'd be a fool to miss out at this price.

Martin Korda

PCZONE VERDICT **80**

FALLOUT: RADIOACTIVE

■ £24.99 | Pub: Interplay | ETA: Out Now

Three great games in one package. You can't go wrong.

IF YOU'VE ever played a turn-based RPG and enjoyed it but somehow never found the time to give *Fallout* a bash, then rejoice. Your hour has come. *Fallout* and *Fallout 2* are two of the best RPGs you could ever hope to come across. With no goblins in sight, this is futuristic RPG action set against an apocalyptic wasteland, with a strong plot from start to finish. The graphics might be a little dated now, but the gameplay is as absorbing and compulsive as it ever was, and character development is hugely flexible, so you can easily personalise your team as the game progresses.

The only real downers are the copious amounts of random battles, which occur way too often, but it's a minor glitch in an otherwise excellent collection. Also included in this package is *Fallout Tactics*, which is basically *Fallout 1* and *2* without the storytelling, meaning it's not nearly as good as either of its predecessors, but it's useful to have if you just want to practice your combat skills. All in all, this is an excellent package that no self-respecting RPG fan should be without.

Chris Anderson

PCZONE VERDICT **84**

It may look like a child's game, but *Settlers IV* is a very complex game.

THE SETTLERS IV GOLD EDITION

■ £29.99 | Pub: Ubi Soft | ETA: Out Now

AS SICKENINGLY cutesy strategy games go, the *Settlers* titles have always been up there with the best. This fourth outing for the series sees you taking charge of one of three races, the Vikings, Romans or Mayans. You battle against the Dark Tribe, a bunch of nature-hating psychopaths whose sole purpose in life seems to be cutting down trees and generally pissing you off. Unlike many RTS games, *Settlers IV* concentrates heavily on economics, throwing up a host of features and options, including trading routes over both land and sea. On its own though, *Settlers IV* is a somewhat short-lived experience, so it's just lucky that this package comes bundled with *The Settlers Mission* CD and the solid expansion pack *The Trojans And The Elixir Of Power*, which not only bump the mission count into triple figures, but also introduce a new race to play as. Can you guess what it is? (Hint – the answer's in the expansion pack's title.) If you like your strategy games to have more substance than your average build-and-rush RTS, then this package could well be for you. That is if you're still willing to pay 30 big ones for an 18-month-old game.

Martin Korda

PCZONE VERDICT **78**

MAGIC AND MAYHEM: THE ART OF MAGIC

■ £4.99 | Pub: Sold Out | ETA: Out Now

THE GOLLOP brothers (renowned for the *X-Com* series) took a little stroll off the beaten track with the first *Magic And Mayhem* game, and the sequel improves on it in almost every way. A mythical fantasy setting, sporadic cut-scenes which develop the story, and occasional puzzles all combine to make a highly addictive game which will keep you playing for endless hours.

The Art Of Magic is something of a revelation in that it refuses to play by the normal RTS rules, mixing spellcasting and combat with mildly challenging puzzles to provide an experience like no other. While victory in combat is often determined by the side with the most units on the field (no surprise there then), clever use of the spells you collect along the way can often give you an edge over your opponent. Minor niggles include dodgy AI for computer NPCs (although it's a huge improvement over the original in this department), and collectable items that are often difficult to see.

Great game. Five pounds. Get it.

Other than that, *The Art Of Magic* is a great example of strong gameplay taking priority over superfluous eye candy, and it's worth your money for that alone, particularly for a measly five pounds. Go and buy it – you know you want to.

Chris Anderson

PCZONE VERDICT **84**

LEFTOVERS

PLEASE SIR CAN I HAVE SOME MORE SIR?

Are you sure? Well if you really want some, OK. But don't say I didn't warn you, because this month's leftovers are like the dregs at the bottom of a barrel of a student's home brew. We'll start with the worst. *Heist* (Sold Out, £4.99). A strategy game based around the premise of doing over banks, this is the epitome of the kind of opportunistic cobbled-together rubbish that litters the dank depths of the cesspool festering at the bottom end of the games industry. Sending someone to do over an establishment and then watching a timeline move across the screen while the job's taking place, then being told whether or not you've pulled off the heist doesn't, in my book, even begin to resemble fun. So not very good then, even for a fiver: 15 per cent.

Then there's *Wartorn* (Sold Out, £4.99). Not very good when it was released, it's even less worthy of your time or money now. Based loosely around the concept of a *Running Man*-type TV show, it's little more than a distinctly average RTS, with some vaguely bearable graphics and a somewhat confusing interface and 3D camera. It's mindlessly enjoyable and the explosions are nice, which means it warrants a well-deserved Award of Averageness: 50 per cent.

Wartorn

F/A-18E Super Hornet

Heist

Virtua Chess 2 (Sold Out £4.99) may have looked better than its _Chessmaster_ rivals on release, but in terms of options and quality AI, it's like a primary school champion taking on Kasparov. No contest: 58 per cent.

Finally then, _F/A-18E Super Hornet_ (Sold Out £4.99). Arriving just too late to save this rag-tag band of dropouts from total social rejection, it does at least offer enough to warrant your attention, especially at such a minuscule price. Its excellent flight model and detail make up for its dated graphics and lack of a dynamic campaign: 70 per cent.

Martin Korda

UPDATES

A place for single-player redemption and multiplayer action

MULTIPLE CHANCES

What's all this about then?

Some PC games are exceptionally flaky on release, with bugs and omissions that are subsequently fixed over time with patches. When this happens we'll take another look and see if the score is worth upping. By the same token, massively multiplayer games are ever-evolving and because of this we'll be revisiting major releases to see what's changed over time.

This is also the place where we take a proper look at the multiplayer side of games. As we regularly review games before they go on sale, often there are no public servers up and running, so instead of telling you how we think the game is going to play we'll wait and do a proper multiplayer review here, outlining how many servers are up and how the game plays online.

NEVERWINTER NIGHTS

■ £39.99| Pub: Infogrames | Dev: Bioware | ETA: Out Now | www.neverwinternights.com | Players 1-64

REQUIRES PIII 450, 128Mb RAM, a 16Mb 3D card and 56K modem **DESIRES** PIII 800, 256Mb RAM, a 32Mb graphics card and an ADSL connection

Rhianna Pratchett* creates her own amusement online in *Neverwinter Nights

MULTIPLAYER

IT WAS ALL part of Bioware's master plan to make *Neverwinter Nights* as much of an online experience as an offline one, and even though the quality of the single-player game is high, it's through multiplayer that the true magic of the game can be found. Despite it being out for less than a month at the time of writing this review, the online side of *Neverwinter Nights* was buzzing, and by the time you read this it should be even easier to get a multiplayer game in any chapter of the single-player game or numerous official and fan-made mods. Lag is dependant on the number of players and whether you're providing both server and client information, but generally the multiplayer shouldn't run much slower than the single-player.

Balors aren't normally in Act I but if one turns up, be polite.

A HUNTING WE WILL GO

As with the single-player game, creating a character is extremely easy, plus you get a number of pre-made characters to experiment with. Once you get in you'll find that, in a similar way to *Diablo II*, the monsters you encounter will go up in strength in relation to the number of people in a game. It's worth bearing this in mind, because enemies also go up in skill as well, so you can charge into a room intent on offing a relatively easily dispatched prison sorcerer, only to find that the bastard is toting fireballs.

There are many features contained within the multiplayer side of the game that are tailored to make the whole experience that much more immersive, particularly if you're playing with a group of mates. Through your character screen you can access pre-set emotional dialogue and actions for your character such as waving, bowing, begging, and laughing. You can even create personalised dialogue and assign it to your quick slot bar. So if you have some particularly witty quip about badgers, and believe me they've all been done before, you are free to annoy your fellow adventures with it as quickly and often as you wish.

I LOVE A GOOD PARTY

Playing through *Neverwinter Nights* with a party not only gives the game a more traditional *Baldur's Gate* feel, but it also gives you the chance to see the various ways all the quests can be completed and the characters can be developed. Needless to say, this all helps create an amazing sense of atmosphere by allowing you to inject a lot more personality into your character. Whether you and your friends just fancy a leisurely preamble while chatting about the latest episode of *Hollyoaks*, or if you're looking for a more hardcore "Lo, goodly wench, a pint of your finest ale, and dare I venture a slice of dragon's liver pie?" approach, the world is yours to manipulate. PM

Sorcerers get to stand back and provide the pyrotechnics.

It's not the most sophisticated of battlecries, but I got excited.

PCZONE VERDICT	
FULL REVIEW (ISSUE 118)	91
MULTIPLAYER SCORE	93
The definitive online role-playing game	

WARCRAFT III: REIGN OF CHAOS MULTIPLAYER

■ £34.99 | Pub: VU Games | Dev: Blizzard | ETA: Out Now | www.blizzard.com | Players: 1-8

REQUIRES: PII 400, 128Mb RAM, 8Mb 3D card and a 56K modem or a LAN connection **DESIRES:** PIII 600, 256Mb RAM, 32Mb 3D card and an ADSL connection

"I can say no. I can say no." *Martin Korda* tries to convince himself he can resist playing Blizzard's RTS epic online. The fool

MULTIPLAYER

"The need to improve and its pure simplicity make it a multiplayer dream"

Online multiplayer mayhem.

MY NAME is Martin Korda, and I am a multiplayer *Warcraft*aholic (patronising applause). It started with the odd game here and there, a couple at lunch and then a couple after work. But it didn't take long before I started binging. Jumping onto Blizzard's incredible Battlenet server – which automatically matches you up with a suitable opponent – proved too much of a temptation, and soon I was embroiled in hazy all-nighter sessions. Weekends disappeared faster than a tub of lard at a fat club. However, it didn't stop there. As I strived to climb up Blizzard's real-time world league table – accessible 24 hours a day from the website – the addiction soon began to worsen.

LAGER TO WHISKEY

I started to move on from mere one versus one games, sneaking off during work hours to the dank sanctuary of *PC ZONE*'s ADSL room to indulge in the harder stuff – 2vs2, 3vs3 and 4vs4 games and finally, free-for-alls – instead. It wasn't long before my colleagues became suspicious, throwing sour-faced sideways glances at my permanently empty seat. Within a week, they'd found my hideout and dragged me back to my desk by the ears, as I kicked and screamed: "Just one more game, I just need ONE MORE GAME!" But it didn't make any difference. The frantic RTS gameplay, the challenge of real-life competition and the four subtly varied races (orc, human, night elf and undead) to play as, soon laid to rest any doubts I had that the multiplayer game would suffer from the repetitiveness of its single-player counterpart, and my addiction deepened. As the orcs I attacked mercilessly, using their offensive strengths to my advantage, but I used the defensive might of the humans to staunchly repel raids and hit the enemy on the counter-attack.

WHISKEY TO THE PRIORY

Time and again I failed to beat off the cravings, using ever more pathetic excuses to slink off downstairs (I need to take some screenshots, I forgot my pen, I think my nose fell off in the basement and I need to go and look for it, etc) every time being exposed as the pitiful online-inebriate that I had become by my now clued up work mates.

I tried concentrating on the downsides of my addiction, such as the annoyance of having my games disconnected midway through, due to sporadic problems with the host server. I tried to hate the game by staring for hours at my monumentally poor first few results brought about by the steep learning curve and the quality of the opposition. Played:10. Won:1 (due to opponent quitting mid game). Lost:9. But to no avail. The need to improve and its pure simplicity make it a multiplayer dream, and the lack of lag on even an ISDN line make it a joy to play. Build a base, raise an army, level up a hero and then clash with the enemy in a bloody battle of wits. Simple. Brilliant. But I realise I have a problem. I know my life is disappearing down the drain like a bullet-shaped turd down a U-bend. And I know I need help. But before you drag me away, lock me in a darkened room and watch me dribble chicken broth down my man-bib as I strive to conquer this affliction, let me have one more game. I just need ONE MORE GAME! Please? PCZ

The general quality of the opposition is of a very high standard.

Create a base, build an army, level up your hero and then lose royally to some smug git online.

PCZONE VERDICT	
FULL REVIEW (ISSUE 119)	85
MULTIPLAYER SCORE	88
The way *Warcraft III* should be played	

THE CONTENDERS

- MORROWIND — ISSUE 117 – 94%
- PLANESCAPE: TORMENT — ISSUE 86 – 87%
- BALDUR'S GATE II — ISSUE 96 – 85%
- NEVERWINTER NIGHTS — ISSUE 118 – 91%
- DUNGEON SIEGE — ISSUE 115 – 89%

THE JURY

- PAUL 'ARCHMAGE' PRESLEY
- RHIANNA 'NIGHT ELF' PRATCHETT
- CHRIS 'SKELETAL' ANDERSON
- MARK 'BEARDY' HILL
- KEITH 'PALADIN' PULLIN
- DAVE 'THE FORK BEARER' WOODS

FANTASY ROLE-PLAYING GAMES SUPERTEST

The *ZONE* adventurers don facial hair, stupid hats and magic boots as they set off on a quest for the best mythical role-player. *Mark Hill* is Dungeon Master

HAIL, WORTHY READER, and welcome to a mighty battle, held in the legendary Halls of Dennis. The prize? The Fabulous Crown of Beardness, a source of wonder, the world over. And though mighty clean-shaven heroes such as *Deus Ex* and *System Shock 2* have been refused admission, the competition remains fierce, for only one can emerge victorious. Armed with the long-lost Wands of Praise and Piss-Taking, our panel of archjournalists awaits, ready for the fray. Or something.

Mark: I thought RPGs were moving on from pointy hats and orcs, but just look at this line-up.
Chris: You just thought that because people try to pass anything off as a RPG now.
Dave: It's really easy though for people to add 'RPG elements' to a game.
Mark: By which they mean your character has got stats that change.
Dave: But RPGs do have an image problem. I wouldn't dream of talking about them if I was trying to pick up a woman, unless she had pointy ears.
Chris: The image problem is with games in general. If you were trying to pick up a girl you wouldn't talk about games at all.
Rhianna: But more women are into RPGs than any other genre.
Chris: Loads of women play *EverQuest* and *Asheron's Call*.
Keith: Is that because they can get married?
Mark: But RPGs are still stuck in the whole AD&D thing – all that Tolkien nonsense.
Dave: The non-beardy stuff like *Anachronox* doesn't sell that well, maybe that's just what people want.
Mark: But you can imagine *Morrowind* in a more realistic or futuristic setting. It'd be brilliant.

MORROWIND

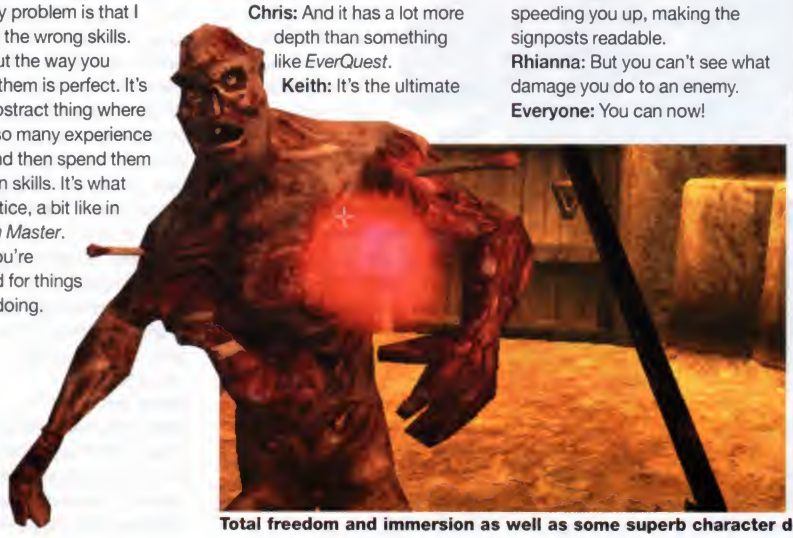
Chris: In many ways it *is* more realistic. There are less goblins and more mechanical stuff.
Dave: Everyone who's played it is totally hooked, even if they don't usually play RPGs.

ILLUSTRATION ShitKicker

Paul: It's because it's a first-person game, so that camouflages a lot of its geeky role-playing elements.
Keith: You don't even know you're doing the RPG stuff.
Paul: But pay more attention to my stats than in say, *Baldur's Gate*, because I'm specialising. I want to get my alchemy level up and become a drug dealer.
Dave: My problem is that I chose all the wrong skills.
Mark: But the way you develop them is perfect. It's not an abstract thing where you get so many experience points and then spend them on certain skills. It's what you practice, a bit like in *Dungeon Master*.
Chris: You're rewarded for things you like doing.
Paul: You do tend to stand in one spot jumping or casting a spell over and over again just to level up.
Chris: If it was ever done in multiplayer, that's what people would do all day. It would be silly.
Paul: They'd have to change it, but it *is* closer to being a MMORPG than most single-player games.
Chris: And it has a lot more depth than something like *EverQuest*.
Keith: It's the ultimate game. You can do whatever you want, when you want, to whomever you want. That freedom is great.
Chris: And it doesn't force you to go anywhere – you can get lost in any part of the world.
Mark: That's the first time I knew it was something special. I saw that fantastic-looking water and thought wouldn't it be great if I could just swim to that island? And I could.
Chris: But the best thing is that there are hundreds of tiny mods that change the game for the better. If there's anything you think you should be able to do or see, you can just download it into the game. Things like speeding you up, making the signposts readable.
Rhianna: But you can't see what damage you do to an enemy.
Everyone: You can now!
Rhianna: Yes, I know it's in a patch, but it should have been there to begin with. It does look beautiful though.
Mark: My problem is that I played it obsessively for two weeks until I got sick of it. I started to realise I was wasting away my life.
Rhianna: I prefer more of a structure. (*More shouts of protest.*) I'm happy that you all like the freedom of it, but I prefer a more obvious story.
(*Here the chat is interrupted by a 20-minute discussion on how to complete certain quests. The words 'mushrooms', 'dungeons' and 'magic potions' are mentioned repeatedly.*)

"I played it obsessively for two weeks until I got sick of it. I started to realise I was wasting away my life"

MARK ON *MORROWIND*



Total freedom and immersion as well as some superb character development aspects put *Morrowind* in a class of its own.

Keith: I just love the way you can join any guild you want. You try and take on too much and lose sight of what's important and what to do next. But in most RPGs if you're a thief, you know you can only do thief-like things. But here you can go off and study and become a different sort of character.
Rhianna: Everyone plays a different game.
Keith: And there's a whole drug culture going on.
Dave: The engine is awful though. It looks good, but the redraw is terrible and it is loading textures every few minutes.
Mark: And the diary is useless. Once you get a few quests you don't know what you're doing. I had to write it down. But I love that you can be a fighter and still learn spells. You're not restricted at all.
Keith: The economy is all wrong though. You get all this gear that's worth a fortune but then none of the shopkeepers have any money to buy it with.
Mark: I downloaded a mod for that. I don't care if it is cheating. You only spend money on training though. You either steal or find everything you need.
Dave: The interface is a bit shit though.
Mark: Which is ironic, because the next game is practically just an interface.

DUNGEON SIEGE

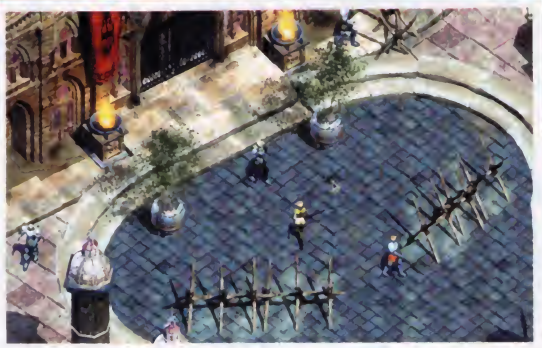
Mark: It's got the best interface of any game I've ever played, but there's not much of a game under it.
Dave: When Chris Taylor was presenting it he just kept going on about the drag and drop and the donkeys. So everything is spot on, except that it's boring.
Chris: When I was reviewing it the score started in the 70s, but the more you play it the better it gets, with big battles and everything.
Mark: I thought it was the opposite. The more I played the less I liked it. It's the RPG equivalent of *Serious Sam*. Mindless and relentless action.
Paul: I liked it in multiplayer. It's like 3D *Gauntlet*.
Chris: When I played it online it was a mess, because no-one was co-operating.
Mark: The best thing about it is that, unlike the BioWare games where you spend the first five hours in a dull dungeon, you're in a gorgeous environment and straight away you're hacking away at things. But ten days later, and you're still hacking away at things.
Chris: It doesn't have a lot of depth, but it is a beautiful game.
Mark: Yes, the engine is fantastic, there just isn't a game. There's no reward for what you do, except levelling up. I need some backbone, some story, something interesting going on. But you just get yet another room full of monsters. But the lack of story is done on purpose.
Dave: That's the way Chris Taylor designed this game. The interface and seamless 3D world is just one aspect of it though, you need something else.
Mark: Again, like *Serious Sam*, it's more like an amazing technical demo. It just isn't really a game.
Keith: You can imagine the engine being sold on to other developers.
Paul: I couldn't get to grips with the camera, it was just all over the place.

"When Chris Taylor presented it he went on about the drag and drop and the donkeys. So everything is spot on, except that it's boring

DAVE ON *DUNGEON SIEGE*

An amazing 3D engine and crystal-clear interface can't hide *Dungeon Siege*'s shortcomings.

THE SHAPE OF THINGS TO COME



IT'S NEARLY ALL TWO-DIMENSIONAL FROM NOW ON

Laying aside the plethora of MMORPGs in development – with *Star Wars Galaxies* and *EverQuest II* at the forefront – there are few big names on the horizon as far as the traditional role-playing game genre goes.

Two very old-skool RPGs in the immediate future are *Icewind Dale II* (reviewed on page 68) and *Divine Divinity*, both using 2D engines. *IDII* will be the last BioWare game to use the *Infinity* engine, and we expect gameplay to be as simplistic as it was in the first title. *Divine Divinity* on the other hand, despite its ridiculous name, promises years of gameplay.

Far more interesting though is *Lionheart*, a combined effort from the developers of the *Fallout* series and Black Isle, the makers of *Planescape: Torment*. It's very similar in look to *Baldur's Gate II* and offers an alternative historical setting with some demonic fantasy thrown in, while using the *Fallout* SPECIAL system. We're hoping its detailed story will make it the natural successor to *Planescape*.

The real biggie to look forward to though is *Knights Of The Old Republic, the Star Wars* 3D RPG being developed by BioWare. Shame it's being released on Xbox first.

Finally, for comedy value alone, we should mention *Another War*, a WWII role-player by the Polish developers who brought us the risible *Mortyr*, which we've reviewed on page 82.

Mark: Did you have the mouse on your head or something?
Chris: What are you talking about? It's one of the best 3D cameras I've ever seen.
Mark: In the end it's the old cliché of style over substance. It's trying to appeal to the mindless hordes who love *Diablo*. But even that seems a meatier game in comparison.
Rhianna: It does make *Diablo* look complicated. It's also very linear, just a straight line all the way through.
Mark: You get to a stage that there are so many monsters to kill you're drinking health potions every few seconds.
Keith: And there are lots of those as well. Your inventory is just loaded with potions.
Mark: It's poor gameplay design. Instead of making the game more balanced they just chuck in all these potions to make it manageable.
Rhianna: I completed it and I can't even remember what happened at the end. What was it again?
Mark: Well, from a game with no story, let's go to one where story is king.

PLANESCAPE: TORMENT

Dave: I know everyone raves about this game, but if you want a story with this much detail, go and read a book. It gets f***ing boring after a while.
Mark: I disagree so much it's hard to put into words. Just because it's brilliantly written doesn't mean it's not a great game too.
Chris: And it's really funny.
Dave: But the quests are so bloody stupid.
Mark: That's because you've only seen the first bits of the game, it's huge.
Dave: I played for 14 hours.
Mark: But you're rubbish at RPGs. You keep saying you've got halfway through the game, when you're not even anywhere near. There's so many good things about it I don't know where to begin.
Rhianna: I'd definitely play this one again.
Mark: There's the fantastic characters, the wall that gives birth, the intellectual whorehouse...
Keith: The what?
Paul: Well, that sums up role-players, don't you think? You can't even have sex with women in a whorehouse.
Rhianna: The character

***Planescape: Torment* is still unbeatable for story and character development, but if you want cutting edge visuals it's not going to float your boat.**

development is better than in any other RPG.
Dave: They should have made it more cinematic though. I don't want waves of text.
Chris: You don't have to read it all anyway. There's a lot of additional information if you're interested.
Rhianna: I thought it was completely absorbing, with lots of little twists along the way.
Mark: It's the kind of quality, both in the writing and the depth of the main character, that you'd expect to find in a good novel, not a game. All the characters who can join your party have their own stories, agendas and backgrounds, and the further you get the more interesting they are.
Dave: We always say we underscored it. It should have got a Classic really, shouldn't it?
Mark: Definitely. I'd give it 93 or 94 per cent even now.
Chris: Easily.
Dave: Even with the graphics?
Chris: They don't matter that much here, and they weren't bad at the time.
Mark: And you have a lot of freedom in how you develop your character, although not as much as in *Morrowind*. There's loads of brilliant sub-quests too and the dialogue trees are just spectacular in their depth.
Keith: The ones in *Neverwinter Nights* on the other hand are incredibly simplistic.

"The main problem is that you play with a handful of people, and if they're not your friends they're likely to be idiots"

CHRIS ON *NEVERWINTER NIGHTS*

NEVERWINTER NIGHTS

Dave: I thought it was going to look better than it did.
Rhianna: The problem compared to *Dungeon Siege* is that, like all BioWare role-players, *Neverwinter* starts off in a really dull environment. *Morrowind* and *Dungeon Siege* give you amazing landscapes right from the start, but the first chapter of *Neverwinter* is pretty much a city crawl.
Dave: Why can't you go into first-person? It's a 3D engine, it would be so easy.
Rhianna: Well, you can possess your familiars.
Dave: I'm not interested, thank you.
Chris: It's a good point really. If you look at *Shadowbane*, which is supposed to be the next big thing in MMORPGs, I think it will die an embarrassing, painful death because it's third-person only. Online gamers want first-person. *Morrowind*'s success proves that.
Mark: The very name of the genre says you're supposed to play a role, and you can only do that in first-person.
Dave: And *Neverwinter Nights* is a single character game, so it's important.
Rhianna: Well, you do get henchmen and, if you're a sorcerer, you get familiars.
Keith: But it suffers in the storyline department because of having just one character.
Mark: Plus it's one you create yourself, not a proper one like The Nameless One in *Planescape: Torment*. Saying that, each henchman does have a sub-plot attached to them.
Rhianna: But after the first chapter you create your own story anyway. The first chapter, just establishes the world you're in. You become a hero and it all kicks off proper. In that respect, it's got a very similar feel to *Baldur's Gate II*.
Paul: They're making a big thing about the toolset it comes with, which enables people to create their own games.
Mark: And there's a big buzz online about the multiplayer, a deserved one as well, it's brilliant.
Chris: But it's not anything like *EverQuest*. I'll tell you what's going to happen. Beard A is going to spend two weeks making his own dungeon, then he'll phone up Beards B, C and D, and they'll all play in it while Beard A plays dungeon master.
Mark: But that was done with *Vampire* and it never took off.
Chris: The main problem is that you play with a handful of people, and if they're not friends you know, they're likely to be a bunch of idiots. You can avoid those kind of people in a MMORPG but here you'll be stuck with them in a dungeon.
Rhianna: But you can play through the single-player campaign too.
Mark: I don't think it's as strong as *Baldur's Gate II* as a single-player game, but that's mainly because I'm not as keen on the henchman idea. I'd rather have a proper party I can control. Plus you can only have one at any time.
Rhianna: They are underused. You should be able to give them weapons and armour, like you could in *Diablo II*. The story and depth are light years ahead of *Diablo* or *Dungeon Siege* though.

Not as deep as previous BioWare efforts, but *Neverwinter Nights* is still a great game both in single and multiplayer.

The only problem with *Baldur's Gate II* is that there's too much of it.

***BGII*'s looking a bit dated compared to *Morrowind*, but the gameplay is timeless.**

Mark: It is very good, but I still don't think it's up to *Baldur's Gate II*'s standard.

BALDUR'S GATE II

Keith: This is the game that got me back into RPGs. It looks fantastic, it's easy to get into, there are loads of character classes, loads of spells and a decent story.
Mark: Another game that was underscored, it should definitely have been a Classic. And it's one of the most addictive games I've ever played. It's the last time I've ever actually played all through the night before forcing myself to bed after breakfast.
Paul: I found a lot of it really cheesy. The character interaction with all the usual squabbling especially.
Mark: Oh no... not that damn barbarian and his hamster Boo...
Paul: And the quest writers just seem to be fulfilling all the standard RPG clichés. The writing just isn't as good as *Planescape: Torment*. And the romances, they're a good idea, but it's all done in such a cheesy way.
Rhianna: The romances was a very popular aspect.
Keith: It's definitely the best-looking 2D RPG.
Chris: I just really liked the quests and the graphics. I would have completed it if I hadn't lost the discs.
Mark: Not me. The sheer length of it pissed me off. I played it constantly for a couple of weeks and I wanted to reach the end because I was really into it. But then it dawned on me that I wasn't even halfway there, and I just gave up.
Dave: That's a problem with all RPGs. They're too long and, at some stage, they're going to drag. At least *Neverwinter Nights* is shorter.
Rhianna: Yes, it's a bit more manageable.
Paul: I was the same as Mark. I thought I was getting to the end and then I saw an online walkthrough and I kept scrolling down past the point I'd reached. Looking back on it after playing *Morrowind*, it just isn't anywhere near as immersive.
Dave: With *Morrowind* you can just look at the map and walk anywhere you want on it. It's really accurate.
Mark: The bloody directions they give you aren't. 'Go to a rock and head northwest, then swim a bit.' Cheers.
Paul: Well, have you ever given directions to a tourist? Have they ever been accurate?

Mark: No, but I wasn't sending them on a bloody quest.
Rhianna: The thing with all these RPGs is that they've all got one aspect that really stands out. If you combined the graphics and interface from *Dungeon Siege*, the story of *Planescape: Torment* and the immersion and levelling up of *Morrowind*, you'd have the most fantastic game.
Keith: Let's make it!

"It looks fantastic, there are loads of character classes, spells and a decent story"

KEITH ON *BALDUR'S GATE II*

***Baldur's Gate II*'s story will have you totally hooked.**

THE WINNER IS... MORROWIND

EVEN SMALL-MINDED GOBLIN-HATERS LOVE IT

With four out of six votes, *Morrowind* was an overwhelming winner, all the more impressive when you consider the standard of the opposition. Proof of its quality is that it has made fans of non-fans of the genre. Like Dave says: "I'm not a hardcore RPG person, but this is just totally immersive and I was hooked straight away." Paul agrees, praising the freedom to do anything you like. For Keith: "It's my ultimate game, I just love it. It's got everything I could dream of in a game."

Chris is another *Morrowind* convert: "It's totally non-linear, the character development is great and the online community is going to make it playable for years to come." Although he does agree that runner-up *Planescape: Torment* is "the deepest, most complex RPG I've ever played, with the best-written storyline."

And *Planescape* was first choice for both Rhianna and Mark, who both cited the character and story as their main reasons for loving it.

THE VERDICT

ALL HAIL FREEDOM AND MUSHROOMS

PAUL
Morrowind
Neverwinter Nights

RHIANNA
Planescape: Torment
Neverwinter Nights

CHRIS
Morrowind
Planescape: Torment

MARK
Planescape: Torment
Morrowind

KEITH
Morrowind
Baldur's Gate II

DAVE
Morrowind
Neverwinter Nights

WINNER
RUNNER-UP

THE GOLDEN JOYSTICK AWARDS 2002

Vote for your favourite games of the past 12 months...

WE MIGHT BE the experts who get paid to review games but you're the buying public. Ultimately you know whether the shiny disc you've inserted into your PC is worthy of the £30 that you've spent on it, or whether it's fit only for inserting somewhere unsavoury. That's why we want to give you the chance to vote for your favourite games of the last 12 months.

This year, instead of running our own awards in isolation we've teamed up with our sister magazines, *Computer And Video Games* and *PlayNation*, to bring you the biggest industry awards bash of the year. This means that as well as voting for your favourite PC games you'll be able to register your vote for games irrespective of platform. It's a living, breathing democracy that even *The Daily Mail* would be proud of.

Here are the categories and some suggestions, but remember you can vote for whatever game you like as long as it was released between 15/09/01 and 15/09/02.

1 **GAME OF THE YEAR** (ALL PLATFORMS)
Sponsored by jungle.com

2 **PC GAME OF THE YEAR**
Medal Of Honor
Morrowind
Grand Theft Auto III
Max Payne
Jedi Knight II: Jedi Outcast

3 **ONLINE GAME OF THE YEAR**
EverQuest: Shadows Of Luclin
Return To Castle Wolfenstein
Dark Age Of Camelot
Counter-Strike 1.5
Laser Squad Nemesis

4 **BRITISH DEVELOPER OF THE YEAR**
Lionhead (Black & White: Creature Isles)
Creative Assembly (Medieval: Total War)
Geoff Crammond (Grand Prix 4)
Black Cactus (Warrior Kings)

6 **HARDWARE OF THE YEAR**
Sponsored by Universal Interactive Studio
GeForce 4
Sound Blaster Audigy
AMD Athlon
Intel Pentium 4

7 **MOST WANTED GAME OF CHRISTMAS 2002**
Championship Manager 4
Splinter Cell
Freelancer
Unreal 2
Counter-Strike: Condition Zero
Command & Conquer: Generals
James Bond 007: Nightfire

8 **GAME INNOVATION OF THE YEAR**

9 **PUBLISHER OF THE YEAR**

10 **RETAILER OF THE YEAR**
Sponsored by EA Games

VOTE AND WIN!

Voting couldn't be easier. All you need to do is log on to the Internet, visit www.goldenjoystick.co.uk and submit your vote. You can enter all or some of the categories on the left, and when you've done this you'll be entered into a prize draw. You could be one of five lucky winners joining us at the Dorchester Hotel in London on October 25, where Jonathan Ross will be simultaneously dishing out awards and trying to make you laugh. Two runners-up will get one minute to dash around Virgin Megastore, cramming as many games, CDs and DVDs into a shopping trolley as they can*. Sounds good? Then get voting...

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GOLDEN JOYSTICK Awards 2002

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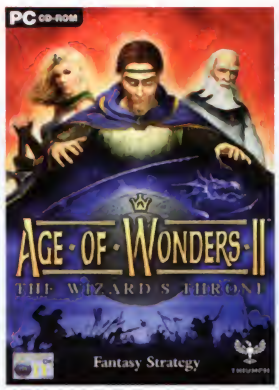
2 GAMES



AGE OF WONDERS II

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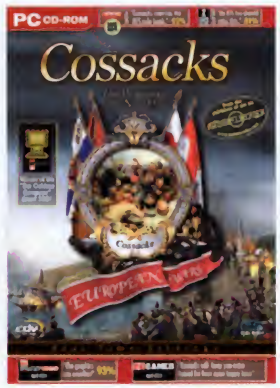
STRONGHOLD DELUX



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WHATEVER TURNS YOU ON

Virgin megastores

MINE-DANCING

■ **HARD WIRED** Steve Spence

▲ Buying new PC hardware in the present day is akin to Morris dancing in a minefield. Each month sees the arrival of piles of new kit, all promising new and exclusive features, but which in reality are probably on every other offering. One of the best recent examples of this is IEEE1394. Know what it is? How about SB1394? How about FireWire? Ah, the Apple answer to USB? All three are exactly the same thing, and if you bought a new motherboard or soundcard recently there's a chance you'll already have it.

The use of megahertz as a comparative figure died the day Intel released its Pentium 4 because of its massive architectural differences and similar diversity is appearing in the graphics, motherboard and memory markets. Finding the figures by which you can weigh up your options and make an informed purchase is nigh on impossible.

Don't get me wrong, I'm not saying progress is a bad thing. When video card manufacturers release new chips which allow developers to write more realistic-looking games or give a real performance kick, we can't help but get a little excited – we're gamers after all. Unfortunately with every innovation comes a truckload of duds and poor imitations, all lined up on the shelf.

There's a bright light at the end of the tunnel however, and since taking over from Tim last month that spotlight hits me. My name is Steve and I'll be your navigator. Please fasten your seatbelts and we'll begin. And remember, although the ride might get bumpy every now and again, you're going to arm yourself with the knowledge that could end up saving you a lot of money. ▼

DIRECTX9: INCOMING

One small step for Microsoft, one giant leap for gaming graphics

THE RELEASE OF DirectX 9 is still a few months away, but it's no exaggeration to say that the new toolset is going to revolutionise graphics on your PC. You might not know much about it (apart from the fact that most games use it), but as with most things Microsoft, it's slowly taking over the world.

Games such as *Doom III* (from the previously OpenGL-dominated id Software) have shifted to the Microsoft camp because DirectX9 provides better support for the techniques and technologies that their developers want to see – a trend that is being seen in development houses across the industry.

SHADING IT

So what sort of stuff can you expect? Unlike previous DirectX refreshes, which have almost been complete reworks, DirectX9 is a logical progression to DX8/8.1 with further emphasis on shaders. Bringing Pixel Shader 2.0 and Vertex Shader 2.0 to the table, coupled with 128-bit floating point colour precision, the DX9-based graphics cards should be capable of producing the sort of visual quality which has previously only been seen in the CGI/cinematic industry.

"Should produce the kind of visual quality seen in the CGI/ cinematic industry"

Proof of the pudding is arriving already in the shape of games like *Doom III*, which is currently blowing away absolutely everyone that's seen a demo. With games like this appearing, the PC looks set once again to reclaim its position at the top of the gaming tree.

And what about the cards that are going to deliver the goods? You can find news on NVIDIA's new NV30 card opposite and flick one page further for news on the Radeon 9700, which will be the first card to hit the shelves. With any luck we'll have the UK's first review next month.

NVIDIA's new Cg language coupled with DirectX9 means effects like this are easier and quicker to create.

SPARE ME THE JARGON, SHOW ME THE MONEY

THESE ARE THE SORT OF EFFECTS THAT DIRECTX9 IS GOING TO BRING TO YOUR PARTY

"I see better graphics depicting a tall dark stranger..."

Indoor lighting is relatively simple to simulate with its straight shadows, but natural outdoor light has never really been convincing before. DirectX9 provides something called 'High Dynamic Range', which allows far more flexibility and accuracy in the lighting model, facilitating high contrast, naturally lit scenes such as these. Expect to see them appearing in a game near you soon.

Static screens don't do this model justice.

This car, which is rendered in real time looks highly complex but it's actually a simple wire frame with vehicle curves created using the Radeon 9700's 'normal' mapping. The paintwork is made up of three layers, a two-toned paint layer, a 'sparkle' layer which gives it the metallic effect and finally an 'enamel' clear layer which creates the gloss and reflection. Looks almost good enough to eat doesn't it?

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SPECIAL REPORT
TFT Round-up. Thin is in...

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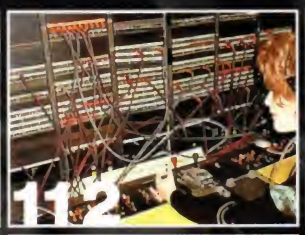
DEAR WANDY
Got a problem that you can't fix?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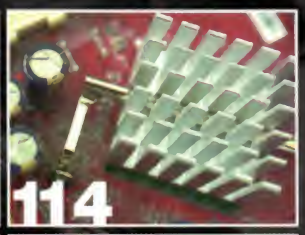
WATCHDOG
Companies from hell...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BUYER'S GUIDE
The best kit at the best prices

NVIDIA IS BACK

Can NVIDIA hold the top spot with its new NV30 card?

CLOSE ON THE tail of ATI's Radeon 9000 series launch this month, comes news of NVIDIA's next-gen card, the NV30. The GPU will be an eight-pipeline affair (the top-end GeForce 4 has four, which basically means the new card will shift twice as many pixels as its predecessor), with full DirectX9 support and a DDR2 memory interface.

And, as well as the 128-bit floating point accuracy that DX9 requires (for improved colour accuracy), it will be capable of an optional discreet 64-bit mode – for extra performance in games such as *Doom III*, which are optimised for the hardware that supports it. To put this in context, films such as *Toy Story 2* were rendered with 64-bit accuracy, so although it sounds like corner-cutting, the standards that it will deliver will still be very high.

Carmack himself believes that although the 64-bit mode will produce marginally poorer visuals, the simpler mode will prove the "sweet spot" between quality and performance. Although ATI's card is able to do the 64-bit floating-point maths, it will do single 64-bit fetches in 128-bit calls and won't benefit from the resultant performance increase.

To utilise Cg, the high-level shading language, NVIDIA is expected to deliver an unprecedented level of programmability on the new chip, well beyond the minimums set by Microsoft's DirectX spec and way ahead of the competition. The architecture that this forms a basis to is called CineFX and from a recent announcement by NVIDIA the move to cinema-quality graphics could be with us before the year's out.

"My next-generation work will be designed around what is made possible on the NV30"

JOHN CARMACK
ID SOFTWARE

The NV3x architecture's CineFX engine is capable of rendering scenes from CGI films such as *Final Fantasy: The Spirits Within* with the same degree of precision seen at cinematic level.

PRIC£WATCH

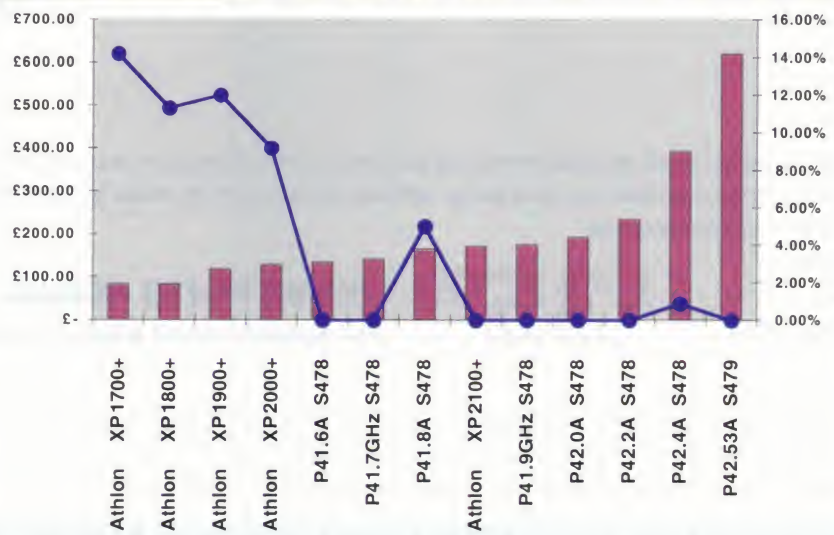
Keep an eye on our charts and you'll never be out of pocket

MEMORY

Price drops for both PC133 and PC2700 but if you were thinking of buying 256Mb of PC2100 and were waiting an extra month for that final discount you're out of luck. Them's the gambles when you're playing around with something as volatile as the memory market.

Price per 256Mb RAM:
- **PC133 SDR**
- **PC2100 DDR**
- **PC2700 DDR**

PROCESSORS: PRICE AND PERCENTAGE DROP



PROCESSORS

Intel has had a very good month, but the downward movement's obviously scared the number crunchers who have called a halt to proceedings. It's been a pretty static month all round with only marginal drops at the lower end of the scale for the budget-conscious AMD range. These are still fantastic value for money and prices probably aren't going to go much lower until the new breed of processors get released towards the end of the year.

SNIPPETS

WINPOD

Apple's iPod has always been recognised as one of the best MP3 players you can buy, and there's good news this month with Apple announcing official Windows support. At the same time it also let slip that there's a new model on the way capable of storing 20Gb of music, which draws it level with the new Jukebox 3 from Creative, which we've reviewed on page 108. Expect to find them on the shelves by the time you're reading this.

SURROUNDED

Despite the fact that there's been no official announcement at the time of going to press, we can exclusively reveal that Hercules is about to unleash the successor to its highly acclaimed soundcard the Fortissimo II. Cunningly named the Fortissimo III, the new card is going to be the first to support 7.1 surround. Only one question Hercules, where are we meant to fit all the speakers?

GOLDEN SHOWER

As if the wild naming convention of the Gainward GeForce4's wasn't enough, this month sees a third flavour of the Ti4200 board from the Taiwanese manufacturer. Gainward claims that its (deep breath) "GeForce4 'PowerPack' Ultra 650 TV/DVI Golden Sample 64Mb" can be clocked easily past Ti4400 speeds with the enhanced settings on their ExperTool utility. Cards should be available as you're reading this, provided they get past customs.

HOUSTON, WE HAVE 3GHZ!

AMD might provide the cheapest chips (see Pric£watch on the left) but Intel has stolen a march on speed. This is cemented further by the news that you'll be able to buy a 3GHz P4 before Christmas, putting Intel more than 1Ghz ahead of its rival. Expect to pay silly money to begin with, but look for big price drops on the current high-end 2GHz processors.

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FIRST LOOK

THE DIRECTX9 REVOLUTION STARTS HERE: RADEON 9700

So ATI is going to be first to sell a DirectX 9 graphics card? *Steve Spence* sticks his head under the bonnet

FOR SOME time now NVIDIA has been king of the graphics world. Market dominance fuelled by *FIFA*-style six-monthly product updates has kept them in the number one spot but that could all change over the next couple of months.

ATI is busy, busy, busy, with new cards like the DX8.1 refresh Radeon 9000 (reviewed on page 109) and this, the next-gen Radeon 9700, which we expect to be the first to hit the shelves in the UK. And, this means that until we see what NVIDIA has up its sleeves later this year, ATI could steal the top-end performance award from the currently undefeated Ti4600, when it hits the shelves later this summer.

The Radeon 9700 marks a bit of a departure for ATI, being an entirely new architecture, as opposed to a new and improved version of an existing core. To cram all the DirectX9 functionality in, the team responsible for the GameCube Flipper chip has been beavering away for almost two years. The pending upgrade to DirectX means that the Radeon 9700 will be able to support a whole new range of shading effects only previously seen on the big screen, with the introduction of Pixel Shader 2.0 and Vertex Shader 2.0.

"The Radeon 9700 could well be the card to put ATI back on top, if only in the short term"

POWERHOUSE

All of this would amount to nothing without the necessary horsepower, but ATI has that covered as well. The 9700 sports the first eight-pixel pipeline architecture to be seen and is capable of rendering up to 2.6 billion pixels per second. By comparison, the Geforce4 Ti4600 (the fastest card you can buy today) comes equipped with a four-pipeline engine. The new pixel shader architecture has been dubbed SmartShader 2.0 by ATI, and the card is set to tear through any game you can buy today as well as delivering similar performance as the Ti4600 to future DX9-driven titles.

Aside from the advances in the core GPU itself, ATI's team has been working on improving the overall performance, and has made some alterations to the way the board is able to move the huge chunks of data involved in a modern game around the system efficiently. One of the standards touted as the saviour for gaming, AGP 8x delivers about 2Gb of bandwidth to the system and ATI has gone to great lengths to ensure its inclusion in the overall design. It's also doubled its previous 128-bit memory interface, which sits brilliantly with the new HyperZ III bandwidth-conserving technology.

STABLEMATE

The controversial SmoothVision antialiasing technique is back again, now in its second generation, and it promises to deliver better visuals with lower performance overheads. Until we've got a card in for testing we can't comment on this, but we think the ATI driver team should focus on stability issues rather than attempting to wrest even more frames per second from its hardware. We're still impressed with what we've seen so far though, and the Radeon 9700 could well be the card to put ATI back on top, if only in the short term – until the arrival of the P10 and NV30, from Creative Labs and NVIDIA respectively. Expect to see a full review of the first 9700 next month. PCZ

THE DON

DON'T TAKE OUR WORD FOR IT – OTHER LUMINARIES IN THE GAMING WORLD ARE HUGELY IMPRESSED WITH THE 9700...

id don't mind what hardware they use as long as it makes its games look like this.

John Carmack is just one of the elite developers who's been very vocal about the huge potential of ATI's new component. id's lead programmer chose the Radeon 9700 as the platform to demonstrate the massively anticipated third episode in the *Doom* series at the recent E3. He's been quoted as saying: "I told everyone that I was going to demonstrate *Doom III* on the best hardware, and there has been no collusion or kickbacks or anything like that going on. Our objective is the technical merit." Impressive stuff, and when you consider that when Carmack talks people listen, ATI must be creaming themselves. Before they get too excited though, we'd like to point out that the latest demo was conducted with a GeForce 4. Sorry lads.

ROUND-UP: TFT MONITORS

EIZO L565

HERCULES PROPHETVIEW PV920DVI

IIYAMA AS4322UT

LG FLATRON 78LE

SAMSUNG SYNCMASTER 171P

SHARP T1620B

Fat is bad, even George Bush has said so. Join *Steve Spence* and worship at the altar of the thin

BUYING PC hardware can be a thankless task, with new cards being released with bowel-like regularity. There's nothing as disheartening as ordering something off the Internet only for it to be classed as outdated before it drops through your door.

But while you may well have bought a new graphics card in the last six months, your case, monitor or peripherals may be four or five times older. For some, these components play second fiddle to the latest GPU, but in the case of monitors for example, is there any point in having a £300 video card hooked up to murky, four-year-old 15in CRT?

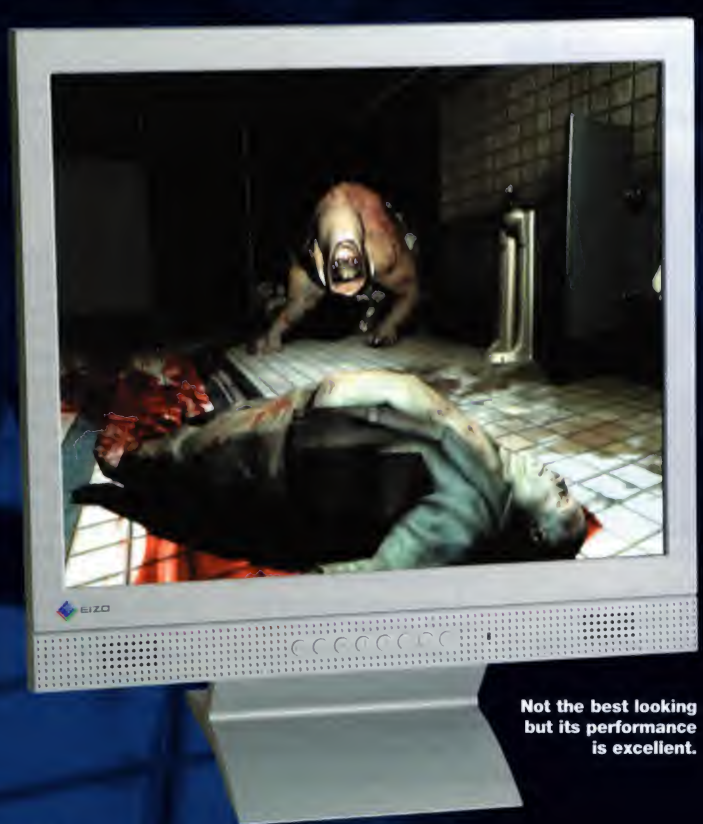
The good news is that displays can represent a long-term investment that, if bought wisely, will outlive pretty much every other system component. But what should you be looking for, a traditional CRT model or a slimline TFT? Eighteen months ago there was no choice: TFT screens were regarded as overpriced junk by gamers because, while they looked impressive, poor contrast ratios and pixel refresh meant muddy colouring and ghosting, factors which were more likely to induce motion sickness than add to your overall gaming experience.

This has all changed now and as manufacturers adopt newer fourth- and fifth-generation panels in their units, gaming TFTs are becoming reality, delivering picture quality far above their CRT counterparts, and providing a much-needed dose of style in an otherwise bland market.

The only downside is the cost. They've dropped in price a lot over the past year but none of the models we've looked at will beat their cumbersome counterparts in the price/performance stakes. However, if you've got cash, and you're looking for a big screen to fit in a small space, there's a wave of new 17in units appearing. Costing much less than their £1,000 18in peers, these units start around £600 and make an interesting top-tier alternative. The future is closer than you think.

L565

■ Manufacturer: Eizo | Street Price: £633 | Phone: 01483 719500 | www.eizo.co.uk



Not the best looking but its performance is excellent.

Eizo has a pretty stiff corporate image. Its latest, the L565 is a pretty simple-looking offering, and the design has been strongly influenced by the company's previous CRT range. It offers a very limited amount of adjustment, (it's fixed in both height and aspect), and the panel can be tilted slightly via a simple but robust hinge connecting to the unit's sturdy aluminium base.

In addition to standard VGA connectivity the L565 offers a dedicated DVI socket, which will prove to be the best method of connectivity for most modern gaming cards. It's worth noting however that the unit doesn't come with DVI cabling as standard. Configuration is a one-touch affair, although you can make manual changes. Using the manual setting is quite easy thanks to a well-laid-out menu driven by the unit's on-screen display.

At its native resolution of 1280x1024 the photographic test images were crisp and vibrant, with absorbing, deep blacks and surgical whites. Colour contrast is also good, with the Eizo boasting one of the best contrast ratios on test. Looking at the picture from varying angles there is very little difference in colour and saturation.

Putting the unit through its paces with the gaming test, overall performance is very high. In some of the more demanding scenes slight trailing is evident although this is something that you'd hardly notice in everyday use.

Overall Eizo has delivered a quality display in a slightly dull-looking case, which would be an excellent replacement for your old hulk of a screen. After seeing it running, our long-standing doubts about a TFT's ability to deliver high-quality output, capable of keeping up with modern games were laid to rest.

PCZONE VERDICT 87

Deceptively impressive

PROPHETVIEW PV920DVI

■ Manufacturer: Hercules | Street Price: £699 | Phone: 020 8686 5600 | www.hercules.co.uk

Look good, plays poorly.

The Hercules ProphetView 920DVI is the big brother of the 15in PV720. As the name indicates the PV920DVI is a Digital Video-based display requiring the use of a DVI-to-VGA adapter for standard non-DVI capable cards.

Visually the unit is unique, a metallic blue bezel supported by a cast aluminium scimitar-like base and it's obvious that a lot of thought has gone into the design, indicated by the price of £699, which makes it the second most expensive unit on test.

Power is provided by a separate transformer, and the lack of integral power supply allows the Hercules to shed some bulk making it the thinnest of the six screens on test.

An added feature is the inclusion of a composite video-in connector, used in consumer video products such as camcorders or digital cameras.

The 2D image quality was mixed, while complex images were reproduced adequately large areas of colour showed noise and slight inconsistencies. The Hercules claims a 150-degree horizontal viewing angle, however beyond 90 degrees contrast was lost and colours showed wide variance before becoming totally washed out.

Our gaming experience was at odds with the specifications: claiming a response time of 25ms we had high hopes for fluid movement, with little or none of the added 'motion-blur' seen in previous generation panels. Unfortunately the reality of the matter proved the opposite, with the panel displaying some of the most obvious aberrations and ghosting of the units evaluated.

A cool monitor if you're looking for style over substance, but although gaming performance is passable it wouldn't be our first choice.

PCZONE VERDICT 76

Disappointing performance from the design demigod

AS4322UT

■ Manufacturer: Iiyama | Street Price: £680 | Phone: 01438 745482 | www.iiyama.co.uk

The best TFT you can buy.

PCZONE BEST BUY

First looks show the Iiyama to be the most feature-rich of all the displays. Sporting dual DVI sockets, S-Video, Composite-in as well as a powered USB hub, the AS4332 offers the most flexible array of display configurations and connectivity seen on any mainstream TFT. Although most modern graphics adaptors support DVI the unit isn't a purely digital affair, the ports support the older VGA connectivity by simply swapping to the DVI-to-VGA cabling supplied.

The panel offers a full range of adjustments, being able to tilt, swivel and pivot, and you can move it up and down vertically as well so that you can get it to eye level easily.

The design, although simplistic, gives the unit a striking quality; this impact was no less powerful when the AS4332 was run through our gamut of tests. In the displays native SXGA resolution, text quality is remarkably crisp and the 2D photographic test samples were true to the control. Overall picture quality is bright and consistent both looking directly at the screen, as well as through the specified 160-degree viewing cone.

Moving on to the gaming tests, we noted little or no persistence in the image, with the 35ms from iiyama responding markedly better than Hercules' 25ms interpretation. The games just looked and felt better.

Although a price tag of £680 may be slightly off-putting we reckon the iiyama AS4322UT is an exceptional flat-panel monitor and would prove to be an excellent investment for any gamer. The standard to which the unit has performed will exceed the life of everything else in your box.

PCZONE VERDICT 91

Crisp, clean lines, on and off-screen

FLATRON 782LE

■ Manufacturer: LG Electronics | Street Price: £535 | Phone: 01753 500400 | www.lge.com

Cheep and verging on the cheerful.

As the least expensive of the six units we weren't expecting the Flatron to rock big bells and it hit true to form. Offering both swivel and tilt functions the unit can be easily adjusted to a comfortable viewing angle, something we found ourselves doing rather a lot as the optimum viewing angle is significantly narrower than the quoted figure of 155 degrees. In fact, after about 60 degrees the picture lost its clarity and was tinged brown/orange. This pales in comparison with units such as the Iiyama and Eizo. It's fair to say that in this instance, you get what you pay for.

The on-paper spec is quite impressive offering a brightness of 250 nits with a contrast ratio of 400:1 placing it highly in the field of contenders. The only minor concern we had was the modest response time of 40ms. Could an extra 10ms behind the pack cripple this unit's gaming potential?

The 2D image quality was sharp if a little inconsistent. Even after we adjusted the settings, the display was extremely bright, and hampered the panel's ability to deliver a true black. The method by which the LG matrix is lit provides inconsistent colouring with dark corners and a washed-out lower quarter of the panel.

During the gaming tests it became clear that similar problems hampered the display. While the 40ms response time didn't deliver, with ghosting as noticeable as that seen on the Hercules, the inconsistent colours and lack of convincing black put this display at the back of the pack.

Price is the bottom line. While the LG may be overshadowed by the likes of the Iiyama, Samsung and Eizo, it's also up to £250 cheaper, which is enough to splash out on a Ti4400 and still have change for a pint.

PCZONE VERDICT 78

Value price tag mirrored by performance

SYNCMASTER 171P

■ Manufacturer: Samsung | Street Price: £799 | Phone: N/A | www.samsungelectronics.co.uk

A good combination of style and quality.

Without a doubt the SyncMaster 171P is the most aesthetically driven of the TFTs we've seen. With a design from F A Porsche, the exterior is a combination of modern materials and retro styling. The gunmetal-finished monitor will have style gurus clamouring for its presence on their desktops.

The nice looks are accompanied by a refined panel fully equipped for most visual tasks. Boasting the highest contrast ratio and with a response time of 25ms it has the capability to handle both work and play with aplomb.

Aside from the external eye candy, the panel comes replete with both VGA and DVI connectivity hardwired to a concealed section at the rear-bottom of the unit. The display is straightforward and automated to configure. An unusual feature unique to this unit is the touch-sensitive controls, giving the Samsung an element of quality, reminiscent of the likes of Bang & Olufsen.

When we ran through the 2D tests we were suitably impressed with the overall output. Blacks if anything were a little too deep but the TFT is easily the sharpest tested. Contrast isn't the only factor in such pieces however, as slight inconsistency in colour at the wider viewing angles pitched the unit as a close second. Gaming is responsive and accurate, though at around £150 more than its competitors the SyncMaster failed to deliver as expected.

Ultimately the Samsung 171P represents an attractive combination of styling and quality. The functionality of the Iiyama however, exaggerates the premium levied by the F A Porsche name.

PCZONE VERDICT 83

A designer display which actually delivers

T1620B

■ Manufacturer: Sharp | Street Price: £619 | Phone: 01923 434647 | www.sharp.co.uk

Small but almost perfectly formed.

Although a full inch smaller than the other hopefuls, the T1620B flaunts some of the best specs of the units on test. Though the 16in display requires a more dense transistor layer to deliver SXGA resolution, this hasn't resulted in a price-hike, and the unit is the second cheapest of the screens we looked at.

Looks-wise the case has a Sony Trinitron feel to it and it's probably best suited if you're suffering from a complete lack of space. It would nestle nicely in a space previously inhabited by 15in displays or smaller.

Viewing angle can be adjusted by both tilting and swivelling the panel, although it would probably just be easier to physically lift and turn the entire unit. Perspective and height are both fixed and although you'd be unlikely to want to pivot the screen, the inclusion of height adjustment would have been a major benefit for a smaller viewing surface.

The 2D image quality was above average, delivering good blacks and a relatively sharp picture putting it on par with the Samsung. Brightness and colour was consistent through the whole viewing arc, and this is one of the few displays which lives up to its stated figures of 170 degrees horizontal and vertically.

General gaming performance was more than satisfactory, with slight aberrations only appearing in the fastest moving of scenes – something which you'd never pick up on if you were actually playing through the sort of furious action that threw up the discrepancy.

In general we were fairly happy with the Sharp's performance. Equalling the Samsung in all but the toughest torture-tests, this monitor is a reasonable alternative to the much larger and more expensive designer TFT.

PCZONE VERDICT **82**

A smaller screen with big ideas

CONCLUSION

The sheer range and choice presented by today's flat panels is pretty astounding. While monitors have historically been bland beige affairs, the TFT manufacturers of today are offering the widest range of features and function imaginable. And from the refined design of the Samsung 171P to the petite Sharp, no two are alike.

If we had any doubts that TFTs had matured sufficiently to support gaming, then units like the iiyama AS4323 have killed them outright. Although the Eizo, iiyama, Sharp and Samsung all delivered decent enough gaming performance the Iiyama stood head and shoulders above its brethren. Its 2D picture quality was balanced perfectly, in 3D it was marginally sharper than the competition and coupled with great connectivity options and its USB hub, plus total orientation control – we couldn't really ask for more.

GLOSSARY

Contrast Ratio The ratio between the brightest white and darkest black that can be produced. Generally speaking, the higher the contrast ratio, the sharper the picture.

DVI (Digital Visual Interface). Data is transmitted through a digital signal from your PC's graphics card to the display, without having to convert to analogue as with standard VGA adaptors. This means that the final signal quality, and thus your picture, is far higher quality.

NITS The standard by which LCD manufacturers rate the brightness of their panels. Another term for Nits is Candelas per square meter (Cd/m2).

Pivot A display with the ability to pivot can switch between landscape and portrait orientation.

Response Time The amount of time needed for an LCD pixel to reach its 'on' (rise) state and then back to 'off' (fall) again. The lower the response time, the better the monitor will display fast-moving graphics.

SXGA Super eXtended Graphic Array, a display specification that is capable of displaying 1280 x 1024 resolution, or approximately 1.3 million pixels.

TFT Thin Film Transistor. A technology for building flat-panel screens. Each pixel on a LCD screen is made up of three elements R, G, and B. Each element is controlled individually by its own switch – in this case a transistor is used as the switch.

Viewing Angle TFT technology means that the picture is only visible within a certain arc. The viewing angle is the maximum inclination from which you can see the images on the screen perfectly.

FACTS AND FIGURES

HOW THEY COMPARE ON THE STATS TABLE OF DOOM

Manufacturer	Eizo	Hercules	iiyama	LG	Samsung	Sharp
Model	L565	PV920DVI	AS4332UT	Flatron 782LE	SyncMaster 171P	LL-T1620-B
Price	£633	£699	£680	£535	£799	£619
Size	17-inch	17-inch	17-inch	17-inch	17-inch	16-inch
Brightness (Cd/m2)	230	250	200	250	250	300
Contrast (n:1)	400:1	350:1	350:1	400:1	500:1	400:1
Response Time (ms)	30	25	35	40	25	25
Viewing Angle Horizontal / Vertical	170 / 170	150 / 130	160 / 160	155 / 140	170 / 170	170 / 170
VGA	1	N	2	1	1	1
DVI	1	1	2	1	1	1
Video In	N	Y	Y	N	N	N
S-Video	N	N	Y	N	N	N
USB	N	N	4 port, powered	2 port, passive	N	N
Sound	Y	N	N	N	N	Y
Tilt	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Swivel	N	N	Y	Y	N	Y
Pivot	N	N	Y	N	Y	N
Height Adjust	N	N	Y	N	Y	N

CREATIVE JUKEBOX 3

■ Manufacturer: Creative Labs | Price: £349.99 | Phone: 0118 934 4322 | http://uk.europe.creative.com

Small Walkman-like machines that can hold over 8,000 tunes? *Steve Spence* smells witchcraft

IF MUSIC IS

the food of love, the Jukebox 3 is Creative's latest attempt to perfect the heart-shaped plate. It's about 25 per cent smaller and lighter than its bulky predecessor, weighing just under 300g, and it holds 20GB of your finest music, which equates to something like 8,000 tunes. Around enough to power the Ministry of Sound for several months.

Creative has stuck with the same Discman-esque styling, with a selection of clearly labelled playback and control buttons situated across its top. The volume wheel on the side has been replaced with a jog-dial dubbed the 'Scroller' to improve navigation, and the power controls have been relocated to a dedicated button on the left-hand side. Strangely, the key lock switch seen on the last Jukebox, as well as most current offerings, has been done away with. This means you can only lock the buttons during playback, which won't prevent it from being accidentally turned on and draining the battery.

DEADPHONES

Transferring tunes between your PC and the player is the simple matter of installing Playcenter 3, Creative's media player. As well as track uploading options, you can also mirror all or part of your collection in Playcenter onto the player via 'audiosync' – an application which delivers some of the functionality seen in rival Apple players.

As is normally the case with MP3 players, the bundled wraparound headphones are weak. It's sad that we've come to expect this, and we actually think it's unforgivable to be expected to pay around £350 for a piece of equipment that you're going to have to upgrade straight away. If you've got a decent pair of headphones already, this isn't an issue but we're still not happy. The good news is that after chucking the offending item in the bin and swapping them for a pair of Sony MRD-G73 phones, the playback quality was outstanding. Our reference source files sounded crisp and clear and almost indistinguishable from the originals thanks to the excellent 96db S/N ratio.

POWER-UP

The power supply is one of the best features of the unit. Rather than opting for an embedded cell à la Apple's iPod, Creative has fitted two battery slots in the back to accommodate up to two Lithium-Ion batteries. Each battery is capable of delivering 11 hours of playback and as standard the player comes with a single cell. Users who want the full 22 hours playback can get a second battery as an accessory some time later this year.

Overall, the Jukebox 3 is a competent successor to the DAP but still feels almost obese when compared to the now windows-compatible iPod. The question, and decision, is quite an easy one – function or style? If you're looking for unsurpassed audio quality and battery life look no further. But if size really does matter and you're likely to call on such a player 'on the go' then units such as the iPod or the RioVolt, which allow single-handed use, might be more up your street. PM

"If you are looking for unsurpassed audio quality and battery life, look no further"

Creative has also included an improved version of the EAX support we saw on the previous player. The new options offer a combination of musical and environmental effects as well as Smart Volume, which actively monitors and normalises peak levels between your files. This is very cool, and means you won't have to risk the deafening boom that certain MP3 tracks are known to deliver. Being able to listen to your music in a selection of virtual 'environments' including a 'bathroom' is an interesting development, but of almost no use whatsoever.

PCZONE VERDICT 84

A worthy successor, but still too bulky

GET YOURSELF CONNECTED

SO HOW FAST CAN YOU GET YOUR TUNES TRANSFERRED?

In line with the inclusion of the 400Mbps SB1394 connector (IEEE-1394, or Firewire) on its Audigy range of soundcards, Creative has upgraded the Jukebox 3 connectivity, offering both USB and Firewire. While we'd never complain about multiple connectivity options, we were disappointed to find that the USB support is for the old USB 1.1, which only shifts approximately 3.2Mbps (400Kb/sec). The reasoning behind not opting for comparatively lightning-fast USB 2.0, which offers speeds up to 480Mbps (60Mb/sec) isn't clear, and this may prove more off-putting for users than Creative has estimated. We've calculated that if you want to fill the player up, you'll need to set aside 12 hours using USB 1.1. And who wants to watch a taskbar for that long?

3D PROPHET 9000 PRO 64MB

■ Manufacturer: Hercules | Price: £139.99 | Phone: 020 8686 5600 | www.hercules-uk.com

ATI's latest graphics card is cheap, but is it cheap enough for *Steve Spence*?

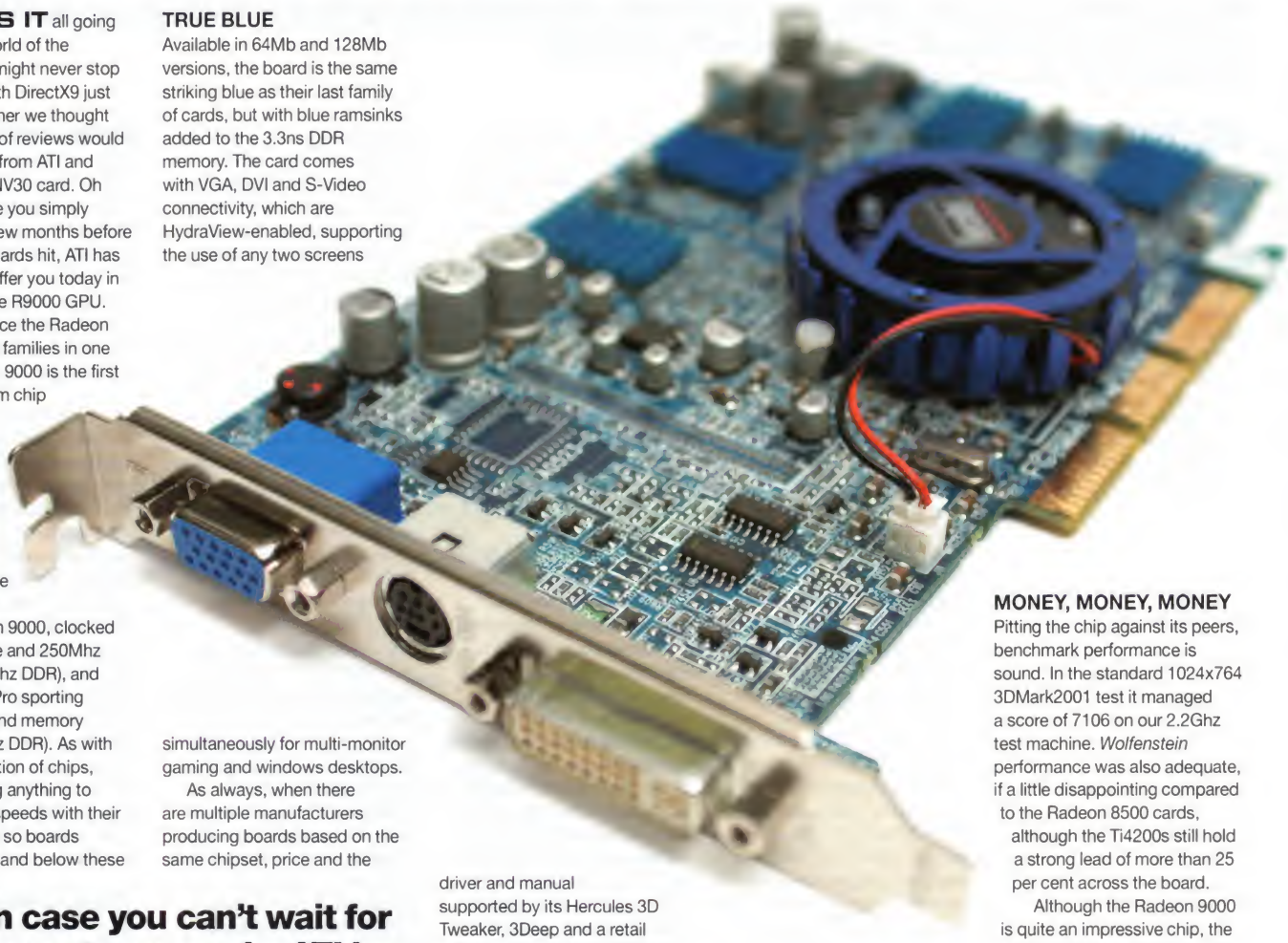
WHERE'S IT all going to end? The world of the graphics card might never stop moving, but with DirectX9 just around the corner we thought the next batch of reviews would be of the 9700 from ATI and NVIDIA's new NV30 card. Oh no. Just in case you simply can't wait the few months before true next-gen cards hit, ATI has something to offer you today in the shape of the R9000 GPU. Aiming to replace the Radeon 8000 and 7000 families in one hit, the Radeon 9000 is the first mid-mainstream chip to sport a full DirectX8.1 feature set, and boasts a budget price-point to boot.

The new GPU is available in two distinct flavors, Radeon 9000, clocked at 250Mhz core and 250Mhz memory (500Mhz DDR), and Radeon 9000 Pro sporting 275Mhz core and memory clocks (550Mhz DDR). As with the last generation of chips, ATI aren't doing anything to enforce these speeds with their manufacturers, so boards clocked above and below these figures may well appear in later months. For now we've got our hands on one of the first consumer boards from Hercules.

TRUE BLUE

Available in 64Mb and 128Mb versions, the board is the same striking blue as their last family of cards, but with blue ramsinks added to the 3.3ns DDR memory. The card comes with VGA, DVI and S-Video connectivity, which are HydraView-enabled, supporting the use of any two screens simultaneously for multi-monitor gaming and windows desktops.

As always, when there are multiple manufacturers producing boards based on the same chipset, price and the bundle is key. Hercules is offering a similar line-up to what accompanied its Radeon 8500 based cards, with the usual driver and manual supported by its Hercules 3D Tweaker, 3Deep and a retail edition of PowerDVD XP. There are no games in the box, but that means Hercules can offer full DX8.1 implementation at an affordable price.



"Just in case you can't wait for the true next-gen cards, ATI has the R9000 GPU to offer you"

While a lot of people expected the new GPU to be a cut down 'MX-Style' version of the Radeon 8500 chip, nothing could be further from the truth. ATI has created the new die from the ground up and although it bears some similarities to its predecessor, the differences are quite obvious when you compare feature sets. As with ATI's last DirectX8.1 part, the Radeon9000 is a four pipeline GPU but the similarities pretty much stop there. The second TMU (Texture Memory Unit) seen on the Radeon 8500 is gone, reducing transistor count and die size significantly. This may sound like a harsh sacrifice, but the only major impact is that the new GPU can no longer do TruForm in hardware, which considering its poor market adoption is hardly a major loss.

MONEY, MONEY, MONEY

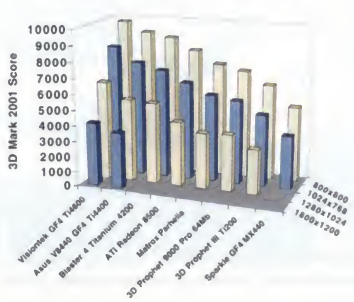
Pitting the chip against its peers, benchmark performance is sound. In the standard 1024x764 3DMark2001 test it managed a score of 7106 on our 2.2Ghz test machine. *Wolfenstein* performance was also adequate, if a little disappointing compared to the Radeon 8500 cards, although the Ti4200s still hold a strong lead of more than 25 per cent across the board.

Although the Radeon 9000 is quite an impressive chip, the benchmarks show it's not quite Radeon 8500 material, let alone comparable with the mighty GeForce4Ti family. Had we seen it sooner when Ti4200 prices were around the £200 mark it may have been a different story, but at the end of the day this can't compete with the down-in-price cards from NVIDIA. Consider this: While the Hercules Radeon 9000 Pro 64Mb has entered the market at an impressively low £140, you can get yourself a Ti4200 (and the subsequent performance gains) for about £10 more. You do the math. PCZ

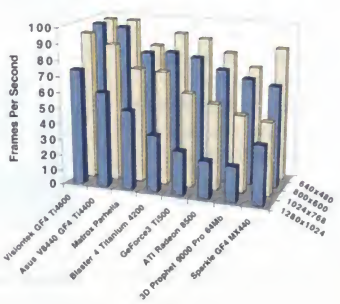
PCZONE VERDICT 73

A good budget chip, but the competition is stiff

3D MARK 2001 2X FSAA



WOLFENSTEIN 2X FSAA



DEAR WANDY

Every month our resident quack reads your letters and solves your problems. Think you know better? Write in, sound intelligent and win yourself a nifty fifty

■ **BIG SHOUT OUT TO THE LBU MASSIF** Phil Wand

LET IT ALL OUT

Share your techie or gaming-related problems with us, and we, in turn, may well share it with thousands of readers via these very pages in a big communal love-in-type thing.
Write to Dear Wandy, *PC ZONE*, Dennis Publishing, 30 Cleveland Street, London W1T 4JD
Email Address your letters to us at **letters@pczone.co.uk** with the subject heading 'Dear Wandy'. Please note: while we can assure you that we read absolutely every techie query sent to us, we are unable to offer personal replies. Sorry.

You can't get happier than Kriss Akabusi on Prozac, or so we're told.

GIGABOLLOCKS

Q In reply to Paul's query about his Gigabyte mobo in last month's *ZONE*, you quote the Gigabyte website as saying that the 71XE4 board can take 'up to 1GHz' CPUs. Gather the lads round for this one, because it's a rarity – a hardware manufacturer *understating* their kit's capability!

The 71XE4 isn't actually limited to 1GHz CPUs, it's just limited to whatever FSB they run. I have a 1.4GHz Athlon (200 MHz FSB) sitting in my board and it's happier than Kriss Akabusi on Prozac. One other titbit worth sharing is that while it doesn't offer all the tweaks and twiddles some boards boast, overclocking your CPU is a doddle, giving a stable 20 per cent increase without much hassle. This is the geekiest email I've ever written, so I've now got to go and kick in a bus shelter.

Michael

A **It's not worthy of the 50 quid top prize, alas, but it is very useful information for Gigabyte owners wanting to squeeze a fatter CPU onto their motherboard.**

SILICON HELL

Q OK, so here's the problem. I was running Windows XP on my PC (1.4MHz Athlon, 512Mb SDR, Sparkle GeForce2 MX400, mobo sound (ECS K7S5A which has never been flashed). All of sudden, my video and sound went pear-shaped – the sound went crackly, the graphics went fuzzy. So I tried repairing the problem by going back in time to a state when my PC was fine. No change. I then formatted the entire thing and reinstalled XP. Again, no change. I then tried reinstalling again – having swapped graphics cards to no effect – but XP failed to complete the installation. As a last-ditch attempt, I reformatted and stuck Windows ME on it. It installed fine, but the problems persisted. What I'm looking to know is if I should remove my motherboard, and chuck it out my window.

Dan Tse

A **I'd say all your testing has shown that your motherboard has indeed had it. The fact you switched to a Windows ME install and swapped out the graphics card with no effect means the trouble lies deeper. Be warned that changing a motherboard is one of the more demanding PC maintenance tasks, as its removal involves unplugging pretty much everything under the lid. Sometimes you'll find that, if space is at a premium inside your case, you won't be able to remove the board without first pulling out peripheral items such as hard and floppy drives. So if you're going to do it, set aside a large desk area and at least an hour's mucking about time.**

If you're pondering over a replacement, look no further than the MSI K7N420 Pro, as recommended in our Buyer's Guide section. If you enjoy overclocking, you may be a little unhappy at the lack of multiplier and FSB adjustments, but the NVIDIA nForce chipset should more than make up for them.

WANDY WRONG?

Q Back in issue #117 you advised Matthew Durrant, who said his machine was slow at playing games, to get rid of Windows 98. You then told him to install Windows 2000 and buy a new video card. I'd agree with the last point, but as for the first two – what are you smoking?

Let's see now: get rid of a perfectly good OS for gaming, and install one that has a fixed monitor refresh rate in OpenGL/D3D and won't run half your games without patches and updates? Get a grip. Do Microsoft pay you for endorsing their new operating systems or what? I would still be running 98 on my new machine if there was any easy way to install it (my drive is too big for FDISK). By the way, he needs more RAM if he's going to run either 2000 or XP. Doh.

M

A **If you reread the letter, Matthew's complaint extended beyond games being on the go-slow. His install of Windows was sluggish when opening menus and folders, two problems which are indicative of 98 and no other operating system. Once you upgrade to a modern OS such as Windows 2000 or XP, annoyances like this never present themselves again. When I upgraded to 2000, I didn't need to patch any of my games, plus later sets of video drivers simply sidestep the refresh rate issue. And while you do need more RAM to run Windows 2000 than 98, his 128Mb is twice the amount recommended by Microsoft and will do him just fine.**

PRANK PAGE

Q I'm having problems setting up my home page in Internet Explorer. Every time I change it to a particular location, it changes back whenever I reboot or shutdown to another web page. Is there something I've done wrong in Internet Options? It must be something pretty simple. Any ideas?

Nick Millership

A **I can't be sure, as not all the facts are present, but it's possible that you have been infected either by the VBS.Loveletter virus or the NewLove variant. There are also a number of Trojans, for example StartPage, which modify your Internet home page forcing you to continually modify it back again. Luckily, infections are rarely fatal. Go and buy yourself a copy of Norton Anti-Virus for Windows. And remember folks, everyone needs decent anti-virus protection these days, not just reckless Internet users. Mischievous software is everywhere.**

SPEED FREAKING

Q Please help me, as I'm at my wit's end with my Internet connection! I'm using a Conexant v90 modem, and my ISP is Tiscali. Although I've double-checked everything on my Internet settings, connection settings, and modem set-up, I can't seem to muster download speeds of more than 3Kbps. And it's driving me up the wall!

"Everyone needs decent anti-virus protection these days"

Ensure your PC is kept away from large fans, as they are a source of interference.

"Be warned that changing a motherboard is one of the more demanding PC maintenance tasks"

What's worse is that with my old computer, with a different modem and a different ISP, I could still only manage 3Kbps downloads. What could be the problem? My cable between the modem and telephone line is 15m long. Would that cause problems? Any help you could give me would be appreciated.

Anon

A There are a number of things that could be causing low connection rates. It could be your computer's proximity to mains power sources, to nearby electric motors, or even to fluorescent lighting. You may also find that a TV or amplifier is generating a strong electrical field that is making 'noise' on your phone line and causing your modem to connect at lower rates.

It might also be you've exceeded the maximum number of connections on your line – if you have answering machines, fax lines or wireless phones hooked up, unplug them before you go online and see if this makes a difference. Your 15m of cable could also be the problem. The longer it is, the more likely the chances of it picking up outside interference. Try buying a new, much shorter cable if possible, and trailing it directly to the phone point – don't coil it. If after all this you're still connecting at a lowly 3Kbps, phone your telecom provider and ask them to turn up the volume for that line. If nothing changes, phone them back and say that you have what appears to be a fault. Because at that point it's quite likely the problem lies outside your four walls!

ROADBLOCK

Q I recently formatted my computer and reinstalled XP. I also installed a GeForce4 card prior to running the Microsoft reinstall routine. After completion, I tried *Counter-Strike* and was given an I/O error. I then tried other games such as *Grand Theft Auto III* that also showed me the same error. Now when playing *GTA*, all menus are in yellow blocks and graphics are very square. I've run clean out of ideas, and I've even put my old graphics card back in to see what happens – but no luck. Please help me.

Simon

A Funnily enough, another reader wrote in giving the answer to this problem: "I have a tip for anyone with Windows XP and an NVIDIA graphics card concerning *GTAIII*. If you're having problems with the 3D text at the start of the game appearing as blocks and thus not allowing you to access the game, then there's a download which will solve all your woes.

The problem is with the Direct3D library file within Windows XP and can be solved by downloading and installing the hotfix from www.microsoft.com/downloads/release.asp?ReleaseID=37942. Happy looting and pillaging!"

The letter was signed 'half_arsed', so wherever you are Mr Incomplete Backside, thank you very much for taking the time to write in.

WHICHDOZE

Q I've read with great interest all your replies to people about operating systems. I'm now about to buy a new computer and want to get the most reliable OS, but I'm rather confused. So please, which is the best one to get? I just want a good all-round platform for games and applications.

Tony

A To start with, you don't want NT. It's a business operating system and won't support the latest games. As for 95, 98 or ME, there are a number of solid reasons not to choose them. None feature scalable memory and processor support, meaning you can't use dual CPUs and you can't have big RAM. They also suck at housekeeping, meaning you'll have to fiddle, tweak and reinstall regularly to keep them running smoothly.

When it comes to benchmarks, Vulpine GLMark and 3DMark when run under 2000 or XP perform better than any other system. When it comes to games, *Quake III* benchmarks almost twice as fast on XP than on ME. And while I'm not its greatest fan, XP is the funeral knell for the old-core systems, and any user of 95, 98 and ME should consider an immediate upgrade to either 2000 or XP. I've had very little trouble running 2000 Pro, but its price does make it prohibitive for home users.

Windows XP: is Wandy mellowing in his old age?

JEDI KNIGHT

Q Last issue you mentioned that *Jedi Knight II* was not supported by NT. While this is true, it will run without any problems with a very minor tweak. The incompatible element with NT is the program launcher, which crashes out when started. To bypass this, create a short cut to either JK2SP.EXE (single-player) or JK2MP.EXE (multiplayer), both found within your *Jedi Knight* GameData directory. Now run as normal using these short cuts. It's a pity that the majority of games are not supported by NT though.

Tim Meyer

A A great tip, chiefly as it means I get to play *Jedi Knight* on all the PCs on my network. Thanks!

PCI FOREVER

Q I have a Voodoo3 2000 PCI graphics card right now and I'm thinking of upgrading to a Voodoo4 or perhaps even a Voodoo5. What is the best PCI graphics card to get in your opinion? PS: PCI will never die! Try polling your readers to find out who still has PCI graphics.

Robert

A If I were you, I'd move away from 3dfx cards as they are obsolete (I still get a little dewy-eyed every time I write that), and the top Voodoo5 cards remain expensive. See if you can track down the Inno3d Tornado GeForce2 MX 32MB PCI. As well as having possibly the longest and daftest name of any video hardware product, it comes bundled with a vast array of free software, including a number of top games, 3DMark2000, Adobe photo editing software and a software DVD player. The only other modern PCI product I know of is the Creative GeForce2 MX 200 PCI, which will set you back around £70.

On the subject of PCI not being dead, I have to say that statistics back up your claim. Recent installs of *Half-Life* encourage the user to participate in a survey, and the results are online for everyone to see at valve.speakeasy.net/survey. Scroll down and you'll see that the most popular video hardware is the Riva TNT2.

The Creative GeForce2 MX 200 PCI. New technology for old hardware.

PAC-MAN'S PORTAL

WIN £50

Back in issue #117, your reply on how to prevent programs running at start-up was not entirely correct. MSCONFIG is available to users of Win98/Me/XP as part of the OS, and is also available to Win95/2K via free downloads on some sites. Only WinNT users have to resort to editing the Registry, but they can also use one of the free start-up managers available on the Web. For more information on controlling start-up programs (including links to the other versions of MSCONFIG and start-up managers) visit www.pacs-portal.co.uk/startup_index.htm. Included on the site is a list of more than 1,100 programs that can run at start-up, along with recommendations as to whether they are needed, useful, unnecessary or virus-/spyware-related. The list is large so it takes a long time to display, but there is also a zipped version available. The site is updated every Thursday and includes input from many visitors and has received many recommendations.

Paul Collins, aka Pacman

Wandy says: I must confess I wasn't aware MSCONFIG was available for Windows XP. I'd blithely assumed that, since it was a) missing from 2000, and b) really quite useful, Microsoft had given it the chop. I've now simply copied the little wunderutil from my XP box and it works a treat. So have some free money!

WATCHDOG

Inept, arrogant, and generally piss-poor. Welcome to the dark side of retailing and customer services...

■ **WRITING THE WRONGS** Adam Phillips

ENOUGH IS ENOUGH!

Don't worry – we're here to help when you've reached the end of your tether. If you've got a consumer issue that needs addressing then drop us a line.

WRITE TO Watchdog, *PC ZONE*, Dennis Publishing, 30 Cleveland Street, London, W1T 4JD

EMAIL Alternatively, email us at **letters@pczone.co.uk** with the subject heading 'Watchdog'

READ ME!

If you are writing in to complain about a product, please supply us with your full name, address and **contact number**. With PCs, make sure that you also include all **purchasing details** such as reference and invoice numbers.

"I decided to email and phone Dabs after the sixth week, but it's like they don't exist"

THE ACCUSED

dabs.com

SIMPLY

PC WORLD The Computer Superstore

WATFORD electronics powered by savastore.com

GUILTY UNTIL PROVEN INNOCENT

Has Mark Jones' monitor done a runner?

SIMPLY AWFUL

This is classic stuff. Well, it is as long as you're not reader Mark Jones: "In December, I ordered a PC from Simply which was a huge mistake in itself," explains Mark. "To cut a long story short, we returned the PC in its entirety, asking for a refund. More than one month later, we finally got a letter saying we'd had the money refunded. Great, I thought, but checking the numbers we were £208 short."

So Mark phoned Simply and was told that his monitor was 'lost'. Mark had sent four boxes via Amtrak but Simply couldn't account for the monitor. "The rep on the phone had no idea whether Amtrak had lost it, Simply had lost it or if they had simply forgotten to list it as received," fumes Mark. "He then said that I could only claim back the £208 if I had a proof of delivery form! How the hell was I supposed to get one of those if it was Simply who had arranged the courier service?"

Mark has phoned Amtrak to see if they have the monitor stacked in a warehouse somewhere but after the 11th call – four of which were an hour long each – he's still waiting for someone to actually pick up the phone at the other end.

And what does Simply have to say for itself? "There is no excuse for this," a spokesperson for the company confesses. "We should have raised an immediate check with the courier to see how many parcels were collected, and as long as this was correct, the only delay should have been between us and the courier, not the customer."

On the day Simply spoke to Watchdog, we were told that you, Mark, should have the remaining £208 winging its way to your account. It will also be adding a further £25 as compensation to cover credit card interest. We hope this is to your satisfaction...

DRIVING DOWN STANDARDS

£1,807. The price of a kick-ass PC these days it seems. Well, it was as of March 7 2002 for one reader, Michael Fallon, who bought a HP Pavillion from PC World and spent a further £200 on a SoundBlaster Audigy card and speakers.

Imagine then spending all that money only to find that it's "pretty much been one big long joke since day one," explains Michael. "At first, the PC crashed every so often. Then, after about a month or so, the crashes became more and more frequent. The Internet started to crash the computer. I can't even watch DVDs any more, as they also crash the damn thing!"

He contacted HP who offered three solutions to the deviant PC: "The first solution was to remove the Audigy card and see if that worked," explains Michael. "All very well, but that leaves me £200 down already. The second solution was to replace the motherboard with a different HP motherboard that wouldn't have that conflict. The third solution was to buy another computer!"

He contacted PC World who offered similar solutions but also added that replacing the motherboard with a new one of the same version might do the trick. Reluctantly, Michael agreed to give it a go.

"Then I was told that the replacement would take ten days due to the fact that there wasn't any in stock at that time," says Michael. "That's great, but I had a project due in, and had no possible way of completing it in time because of the random hang-ups and crashes!"

Michael was desperate at this point and has since decided that he just wants shot of his "useless oversized paperweight."

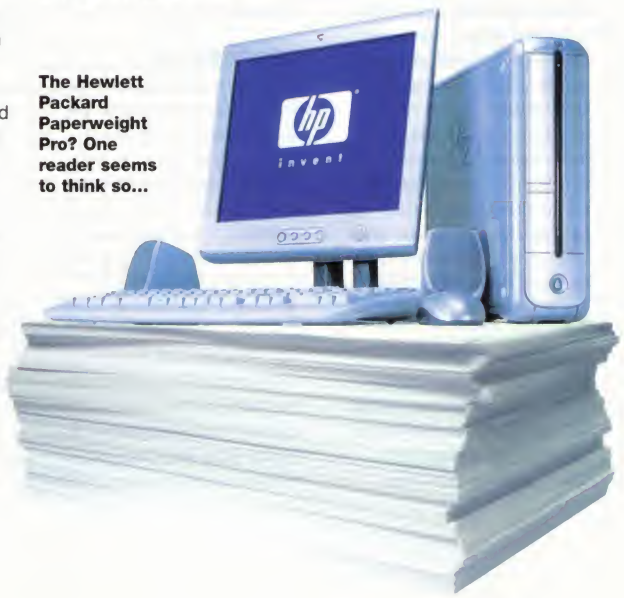
Off we trotted to Dixons who owns PC World. A spokesperson offered the following: "I'd like to take a watching brief on this complaint – Mr Fallon originally contacted us about his PC on June 18. We ordered a new motherboard the same day, and estimated a delivery time of ten working days. We're sorry this is longer than usual, and sympathise that Mr Fallon relies heavily on his PC. However, as this is the first repair, and because it sounds like a compatibility issue rather than an inherent fault, we're offering a repair rather than a refund."

For now, this seems fair enough in Watchdog's eyes and, to be honest, if you were up against the wall with your work, Mike, we'd have recommended popping out the Audigy card (which seems to be a key part of the problem), finishing your project work and then getting the problem sorted out once those pesky deadlines were dealt with...

WATFORD WOES

"It all started when I decided to build a second PC to use as a server..." And so begins reader Neil Gibson's hideously techie story. It boils down to a new motherboard and how its BIOS chip was buggered up by a BIOS upgrade supplied on an accompanying CD. What Neil wants to know is simple: why the hell was the program supplied with the motherboard if all it was going to do was screw the chip up?

He contacted Watford Electronics, the supplier of said hardware. They apparently washed their hands of it, saying it was down to Neil and that he would have to contact the manufacturer, ASUS, directly. So Neil contacted Landmarq who are the main dealers for ASUS in the UK: "They were very helpful to a point, but they do not normally deal directly with the public, and so could not guarantee anything," explains Neil. "Even so they did try to contact Watford on my behalf but to no avail. So I am left £125 out of pocket."



The Hewlett Packard Paperweight Pro? One reader seems to think so...

EVEN A BLIND SQUIRREL FINDS AN ACORN ONCE IN A WHILE...

Reader Adam Tucker is impressed. He had a problem with his two-year-old Sony A200 monitor that came with his PC system: "The company I bought the system from had since gone bust so I phoned up Sony direct," says Adam. "I was angry and not really expecting a helpful response. But I explained the situation and not only were they helpful, they let me take the monitor to them directly rather than pay a huge postage fee. They even sent the monitor back in the post, which I didn't expect at all."

As it turns out, the fault was only with a power connector at the back of the monitor but still, Adam is "a very happy man."

Sony – above and beyond the call of duty.

Over to Watford Electronics: "We have not been able to assist him in his problem as flashing the BIOS and it then subsequently failing is not covered under the manufacturer's warranty. Mr Gibson was asking for a replacement motherboard from us which we are unable to supply," comes back the not-so-positive reply. "We do not stock replacement BIOS chips here nor do we carry out repairs and testing down to component level, so we were unable to help from this side."

Watford basically says that there are warnings about using the program with your particular version of the BIOS, Neil. A spokesperson explains: "Speaking to one of my technicians who has used the ASUS Windows flash program before, he says that these warnings appear before flashing the BIOS. So the warnings were there for Mr Gibson to see."

They say they can try and see if they can take "an extra step over the boundaries of our normal customer services" and have the board returned to their supplier or the manufacturer, "but all carriage costs, parts and labour costs will be chargeable and these charges will be forwarded to Mr Gibson."

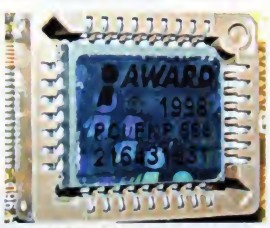
DABS DISASTER?

Jeremy Douet wrote to us concerning a Gigabyte motherboard he bought from Dabs a year ago. It packed in recently, so Jeremy sent it back and was told it would take four to six weeks to be sorted. What he eventually discovered though was that it actually took four to six weeks from when the board had been sent back to the manufacturer itself. This meant adding a further two weeks' wait according to Jeremy.

"After that, I read two horror stories about Dabs. I decided to email and phone them at the end of the sixth week from when Dabs received the board," explains Jeremy. "Nothing, absolutely nothing – it's like they don't exist! I've sent about ten emails (no joke), have held on the phone three times for more than half an hour; once to be unceremoniously cut off, another time to lose my place in the queue. Worst of all, on a different occasion I worked my way from number 34 to two in the queue only to be cut off! That took 48 minutes!"

Jeremy reckons that it's not so much how long it takes to get a fixed board but the constant "mailing and hanging on the phone" that really bugs him.

We contacted Dabs who said that the time it takes to sort out replacements is clearly stated in their online support section. Fair enough, but what about all the time spent on the phone and the apparently ignored emails? Any explanation? Er... seems not. PCZ



The BIOS chip – it's a technical marvel but a bit of a bugger to sort out when it goes wrong.

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A = 0 1
Age of Emp.2: Conqueror
Age of Emp: Rise of Rome
Age of Empires
Age of Empires 2
Age of Wonder
Airport Inc
Alien vs Predator
Alien vs Predator (Gold)
Aliens vs Predator 2
Alone in the Dark 4
Army Men 2
Army Men: World War
Atrox

B = 0 2
Baldur's G.2: Sh. of Amn
Baldur's G.2: Thr.of Bhaal
Baldur's Gate
Beavis & Butthead
Black & White
Black & White: Creat. Isle
Blood Omen 2
Broken Sword 1
Broken Sword 2

C = 0 3
C&C: Red Alert
C&C: Red Alert 2
C&C: Red Alert 2 Y's Rev.
C&C: Renegade
C&C: Tiberian Sun
C. Wolfenstein, Return to
Caesar 3
Casino Tycoon
Champ. Manager 2000
Champ. Manager 2001
Champ. Manager 3
Champ. Manager 98
Champ. Manager 99
Civilization 3
Command & Conquer
Commandos 2
Commandos Behind Lines
Constructor
Cossacks: The Art of war
Cossaks: European Wars
Curse of Monkey Island
Cutthroats

D = 0 4
Dark Reign 2
Delta Force 2
Delta Force: T. F. Dagger
Descent
Desperados
Deus-Ex
Diablo
Diablo 2
Die Hard Nakatomi Plaza
Disc World 2
Discworld Noir
Doom
Driver
Duke Nukem: Manhattan
Dune 2000
Dungeon Keeper
Dungeon Keeper 2
Dungeon Siege

E = 0 5
Echelon
Empire Earth
Escape Monkey Island

F = 0 6
FA P.Lgue Fball Man.'02
Fast Food Tycoon
Fate of the Dragon
FIFA 2001
FIFA 2002
FIFA 99
Final Fantasy 7
Flight Sim 98
Flight Unlimited 2
Fur Fighters

G = 0 7
Gabriel Knight 3
Gangsters
Gangsters 2
Global Operations
Grand Theft Auto
Grand Theft Auto 2
Grand Theft Auto 3
Grim Fandango
GTA: London 1969

H = 0 8
Half Life
Half Life: Blue Shift
Half Life: Opposing Force
Harry Potter
Heist
Heroes of M&M III
Hidden & Dangerous
Hitman
Hogs of War
Hooligans: Storm Europe

I = 0 9
I.Jones: Infernal Machine
Imperium Galactica 2

J = 1 0
Jedi Knight 2

K = 1 1
Knights and Merchants

M = 1 3
Master of Olympus
Mat Hoffman's Pro BMX
Max Payne
MDK 2
Mech Commander 2
Medal of Honor: Allied Assault
Men in Black
Metal Gear Solid
Microsoft Flight Sim 2000
Midtown Madness
Midtown Madness 2
Monopoly
Monopoly Tycoon
Monsters Inc
Moto Racer 3
Mummy
Myst
Myst 3

N = 1 4
Need 4 Speed
Need 4 Speed 5 Porsche
Neverwinter Nights
No One Lives Forever

O = 1 5
Operation Flashpoint

P = 1 6
Patrician 2
Pharoah
Planet of the Apes
Populous the Beginning
Project IGI

R = 1 8
Rainbow Six
RC Tycoon: C'screw Follies
Red Alert (C&C)
Red Alert 2
Red Faction
Renegade
Return to C. Wolfenstein
Roller Coaster Tycoon

S = 1 9
Screamer 4x4
Seadogs
Settlers 3
Shogun: Total War
Sim City 3000
Sim Golf
SimCity 2000
Sims
Sims Hot Date
Sims House Party
Sims Livin' It Up
Sims on Holiday
Soldier of Fortune
Soldier of Fortune 2
Soul Reaver 2
Spiderman The Movie
Sports Car GT
Star Trek: Elite Forces
Star Trek: Empires at War
Star Wars: Clone Camps.
Star Wars: Gal.B'grounds
Star Wars: Jedi Knight
Star Wars: Jedi Knight 2
Star Wars: Phantom M.
Star Wars: Rogue Squad.
StarCraft
StarCraft: Broodwar
Stronghold
Sudden Strike
Swat 3

T = 2 0
Tachyon: The Fringe
Theme Hospital
Theme Park
Theme Park Inc
Theme Park World
Thief: Dark Project
Tomb Raider
Tomb Raider 2
Tomb Raider 3
Tomb Raider 5
Tony Hawk's 2
Total Annihilation

U = 2 1
Uplink

W = 2 3
Warcraft 2
Warrior Kings
Wolfenstein 3D
World Cup 2002
World War 3: Black Gold

Z = 2 6
Zoo Tycoon

THE ABOVE LIST IS JUST A SELECTION OF WHAT'S AVAILABLE

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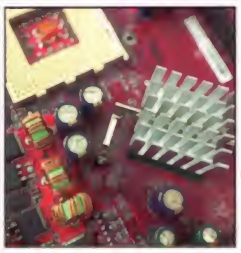
24hr Customer Service: (Freephone) 0800 081 6000

BUYER'S GUIDE

Are you looking to upgrade your PC? Since we've started this Buyer's Guide, prices have dropped consistently every month – and we'll keep on checking to ensure that this guide gives you the most accurate and up-to-date information. While we're on the subject, memory is dirt cheap as well – if you're still labouring with less than 128Mb RAM, buy some now

◀ BEST BUY

MOTHERBOARD



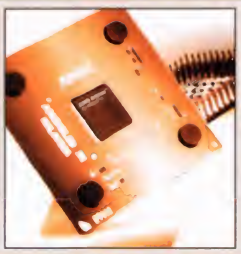
MSI K7N420 PRO

NOW £95 WAS £102

STREET PRICE £95 inc VAT
TELEPHONE N/A
MANUFACTURER MicroStar International
WEBSITE www.msi.com.tw

The Asus A7V266-E just gets edged off its well-deserved plinth by a motherboard featuring the NVIDIA nForce 420D chipset. In testing, the board showed superb performance in the crucial OpenGL and DirectX 8.1 tests. It has a number of optional extras, so check with the retailer about what to expect in the box you buy – integrated LAN, additional USB slots, TV out and digital audio out are all available. Bear in mind that if you have an old video card, you may not need a new one with this board – it has a GeForce 2 MX class GPU integrated into the Northbridge… for free! Bit of a bonus…

PROCESSOR



AMD ATHLON XP 1900+

STREET PRICE £118 inc VAT
TELEPHONE N/A
MANUFACTURER AMD
WEBSITE www.amd.com

The Athlon XP processors are named after the clockspeed of Intel processors it claims to beat. The 1900+ actually runs at a clockspeed of 1.6GHz, and with new so-called QuantiSpeed architecture, more on-chip cache and souped-up 3DNow! instruction set, it offers superb performance in a range of applications – not least games. While the 2100 is currently the fastest processor in the range, the 1900+ is good value for money. Ensure your Socket A motherboard has an updated BIOS and correctly rated components to run an XP processor before you fork out.

HARD DRIVE

SEAGATE BARRACUDA ATA IV 60GB

STREET PRICE £71 inc VAT
TELEPHONE 01628 890 366
MANUFACTURER Seagate
WEBSITE www.seagate.com

We have a new Best Buy hard drive – the 60Gb Seagate Barracuda ATA IV. The IBM Deskstar 75GXP drives are looking a bit long in the tooth alongside this modern beastie. Although it's a 7,200 RPM drive, it runs both cooler and quieter than its peers, which can only be a good thing. Fully loaded with a 2Mb cache, the performance is solid across the board, both in terms of average seek times and sustained data throughput. We recommend the 60Gb drive on the basis that it seems pretty good value for money, though the range also offers 20, 40 and 80Gb variants.

MONITOR

IIYAMA VM PRO 512 22IN

NOW £545 WAS £633

STREET PRICE £545
TELEPHONE 01438 745482
MANUFACTURER iiyama
WEBSITE www.iiyama.co.uk

Our long-standing Best Buy monitor, the VM Pro 510, is superseded by the 512. Equipped with the latest Mitsubishi aperture grille Diamondtron screen, it has a rather smaller viewable area than suggested, closer to 20 inches than 22, but gives outstanding results at resolutions up to 2048 x 1536 at 85Hz – something many graphics cards can't even support. If your video card has the bandwidth, you can rely on this monitor to give you pin-sharp results at 1600 x 1200. There's also the useful inclusion of a four-port USB hub as well as a pair of speakers – even if they do sound a bit tinny.

GRAPHICS CARD

VISIONTEK XSTASY GEFORCE 4 TI4600

STREET PRICE £323 inc VAT
TELEPHONE N/A
MANUFACTURER VisionTek
WEBSITE www.visiontek.com/uk

We've now had the first batch of GeForce 4 cards cross the *PC ZONE* bench, and we have a new high-end winner – though it's gonna cost you an arm and a leg for the time being. Move over GeForce 3 Ti500 – here comes the GeForce 4 Titanium 4600, supplied by VisionTek. The clever memory architecture of the GeForce 4 Titanium processor, coupled with 650MHz DDR memory, gives this card bandwidth fearsome enough to cope with FSAA, as well as high resolutions – at blistering frame-rates. It's faster than Radeon, and faster than GeForce 3. It even blows Xbox out of the water. Price shown is a conversion of the Euro RRP; no street price is available yet.

BEST BUDGET ▶

MOTHERBOARD

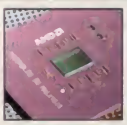
GIGABYTE GA-7VTXH

NOW £76 WAS £83

STREET PRICE £76 inc VAT
MANUFACTURER Gigabyte
TELEPHONE 01908 362700
WEBSITE www.gbt-tech.co.uk

Usurps another great Gigabyte board – this one is a great Via KT266A-based DDR solution. Integrated are both 10/100 LAN and four-channel audio from Creative. In testing it proved stable and among the faster DDR boards for Athlon. A complete bargain.

PROCESSOR



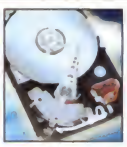
DURON 1.3 GHz

NOW £57 WAS £59

STREET PRICE £57
MANUFACTURER AMD
TELEPHONE N/A
WEBSITE www.amd.com

Durons are basically Athlons with smaller Level 2 (L2) processor caches. This still compares favourably with Intel's ageing Celeron chip cache structure. Besides, Duron still has the blistering Floating Point Unit (FPU) mathematical calculation speed, making it a top processor for gamers.

HARD DRIVE



SEAGATE U SERIES 6 40GB

STREET PRICE £55 inc VAT
MANUFACTURER Seagate
TELEPHONE 01628 890366
WEBSITE www.seagate.com

The U Series 5 drives are now pretty much unavailable, but is replaced in the Buyer's Guide by its own replacement. The U Series 6 drive has much the same spec as the Series 5, but runs quieter and cooler. We've also uprated capacity to 40Gb – great value.

MONITOR

HANSOL 710P 17IN

STREET PRICE £135 inc VAT
MANUFACTURER Hansol
TELEPHONE 01252 360400
WEBSITE www.hansol-uk.com

For the budget-conscious gamer, Hansol is a company well worth a look. With a fabulously low price, it will handle 1024 x 768 with a vertical refresh rate of 85Hz, and 1600 x 1200 at a creditable 75Hz. There's not a lot that'll touch this for the money.

GRAPHICS CARD

VIDEOLOGIC VIVID!XS 32MB

NOW £49 WAS £71

STREET PRICE £49 inc VAT
MANUFACTURER VideoLogic
TELEPHONE 01923 277488
WEBSITE www.videologic.com

The new Kyro II chipset blows its slower Kyro brethren to smithereens at 175MHz clockspeed. The 32Mb Vivid!XS replaces the Hercules 3D Prophet 4500 as Best Budget Buy – but only just, there's barely anything to choose between the two.

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The Memory Experts

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◀ BEST BUDGET

HERCULES GAMESURROUND FORTISSIMO II DE

STREET PRICE £45 inc VAT
MANUFACTURER Hercules
TELEPHONE 020 8686 5600
WEBSITE www.hercules-uk.com

Hercules has just updated its fantastic Gamesurround Fortissimo II card to incorporate support for 5:1 sound, which merely cements its position as best budget buy. All other features stay the same.

MICROSOFT GAMEVOICE USB

STREET PRICE £34 inc VAT
MANUFACTURER Microsoft
TELEPHONE 0870 601 0100
WEBSITE www.microsoft.com/sidewinder/

So how can a set of budget headphones cost almost as much as our Best Buy? Simple – the GameVoice enables you to talk to your mates over the Internet. It works very well, and as they double as a more than decent set of headphones, they're a bit of a bargain.

YAMAHA CRW3200E-VK

STREET PRICE £88
MANUFACTURER Yamaha
TELEPHONE N/A
WEBSITE www.yamaha-it.de

Yamaha has been making great CD-RW drives, and the 3200 is the company's current range-topper. We love its AudioMaster burning mode for high-quality audio CD burning. You will too. A veritable bargain.

SAITEK CYBORG 3D GOLD

STREET PRICE £30
MANUFACTURER Saitek
TELEPHONE 01454 451900
WEBSITE www.saitek.com

Saitek's current generation of sticks are fabulous. The Cyborg Gold is a top-line USB stick that excels across the board. The design is superb, both strong and adjustable – even the left-handed are catered for – and its response and accuracy can only be described as unequalled.

SIDEWINDER PLUG 'N' PLAY

STREET PRICE £19.99
MANUFACTURER Microsoft
TELEPHONE 0870 601 0100
WEBSITE www.microsoft.com/sidewinder/

Four buttons, two triggers, directional pad, USB. Dead simple, dead effective and really rather cheap. The Plug 'n' Play Gamepad is the new basic controller from the Seattle Sidewinders and comes in funky transparent plastic, in contrast to the gloomy black pads of yesteryear.

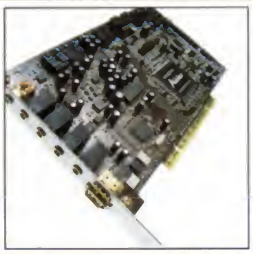
HERCULES XPS210

STREET PRICE £40 inc VAT
MANUFACTURER Hercules
TELEPHONE 020 8665 1881
WEBSITE www.hercules-uk.com

This small but perfectly formed 2.1 speaker set is cheap – but doesn't sound it. With tone controls and stereo enhancement, it's an ideal solution for desktop gaming. The satellites and subwoofer are well matched, giving a decent overall sound. And adorned in royal blue, it looks the part too...

BEST BUY

SOUNDCARDS



CREATIVE LABS SOUND BLASTER AUDIGY PLAYER

STREET PRICE £79 inc VAT
MANUFACTURER Creative Labs
TELEPHONE N/A
WEBSITE www.europe.creative.com

The SonicFury gets pipped to the post by the excellent new Audigy Player from Creative Labs. Successor to the very successful Sound Blaster Live! series, the Audigy has an audio engine four times as powerful, excellent audio quality, and a range of features that makes it the most versatile all-round gaming/music/DVD soundcard. EAX Advanced HD adds a range of new 3D audio features, though it'll be a while before games filter through with support for the more esoteric options. It's about £20 more expensive than its main competition, but we reckon it's well worth it.

HEADPHONES

SENNHEISER HD 200 MASTER

STREET PRICE £45
MANUFACTURER Sennheiser
TELEPHONE 01494 551 551
WEBSITE www.sennheiser.co.uk

This German audio company has been around for more than 50 years, and was founded by the suitably Teutonic-sounding Dr Fritz Sennheiser. The HD 200s are actually targeted at DJs, and for very good reason. They're very, very loud and they're also very, very strong. They feature a closed back design, which means you can hear nearby rocket jumpers quite comfortably. And, crucially for those extended gaming sessions, they're comfortable and light, weighing in at around 140g. A great pair of cans at a top price – well, what are you waiting for?

CDRW DRIVES

PLEXTOR PX-W4012TA

NOW £89 WAS £108

STREET PRICE £89
MANUFACTURER Plextor
TELEPHONE +32 2 725 5522
WEBSITE www.plextor.com

Plextor once again take top honours with a superfast 40x Write, 12x ReWrite and 40x Read drive. No matter what task you throw at it, it simply zips along, and BURN-Proof technology stops buffer underruns (where the data flow from the burner's cache to the burner is interrupted) from rendering the drive a coffee placemat machine. Particularly nifty is its PoweRec II technology which analyses the quality of the blank media being used and adjusts the write speed downwards if necessary. All in all, we reckon this is the best drive out there – and it's shipped with Nero 5, another major bonus.

JOYSTICKS

HOTAS COUGAR

STREET PRICE £249 inc VAT
MANUFACTURER Thrustmaster
TELEPHONE 020 8665 1881
WEBSITE www.thrustmaster.co.uk

Have we finally snapped? Have almost ten years of producing the finest magazine known to man finally taken its toll? £249.99 for a joystick? Ah, but the HOTAS is probably the finest flight stick in the world, with a manual that must have taken a year to research and quality materials throughout, including the independent throttle stick. For those who have everything this is the closest you'll get to sitting in a plane, if you're strong enough to lift it out of the box. Everyone else should avert their eyes and buy the Saitek Cyborg Gold instead. Or a diamond necklace or some other really expensive thing.

GAMEPADS

WINGMAN CORDLESS

STREET PRICE £40
MANUFACTURER Logitech
TELEPHONE 020 7309 0127
WEBSITE www.logitech.com

The PC might not have a single killer gamepad in its locker (for Christ's sake why doesn't somebody just copy the PS2 design) but this is the closest yet. The infra-red interface doesn't seem to hinder your input, and the discreet receiver unit won't clutter your desk unnecessarily. Plus the six-metre range doesn't suffer from any noticeable response deterioration the further you roam. Setting everything up is easy as pie, even if a lack of real documentation means the pad's functions aren't explained in any great detail. Comfortable to use, plenty of buttons and a complete lack of cables make this the best buy, but only by a short distance.

SPEAKERS

KLIPSCH PROMEDIA 4.1

STREET PRICE £299
MANUFACTURER Klipsch
TELEPHONE 0031 314 383 699
WEBSITE www.klipsch.com

Take your pick for Best Buy between the stunning Klipsch 4.1 THX-approved speakers and the cheaper long-term favourites Sirocco Crossfire from Videologic. Both represent great value for money, but the Klipsch edges it in the listenability stakes, hence their new entry here. They're beautifully made, sound amazing and are the first speakers that can split your ears just as well as the Crossfires. You'll find no better speaker set-up for watching DVDs and playing games on PC. Your neighbours will love it.

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WIN!

THE ULTIMATE MAKEO

WITH OVER £2000 WORTH OF KIT!

Looking for a way of getting your hands on the best kit that money can buy without actually spending any yourself? What a coincidence...

"NEW hardware good, new hardware prices bad." That's the motto you have to chant before you go to bed each night, and the reason most of your new games play like they've been dipped in treacle. Well, not no more. If you win this competition all of your hardware woes will be over because we've teamed up with NVIDIA, masters of all things 3D, and Samsung, masters of the thin monitor, to give you the chance to win the things your PC has been crying out for.

THE PRIZES

There are two prizes to win. If you're the lucky overall grand prizewinner you get a bundle containing an NVIDIA nForce 2 motherboard (which is so flash and new it hasn't even been released yet), an AMD Athlon XP 2200+ processor, a top-end NVIDIA GeForce4 Ti4600 128Mb graphics card, 512Mb RAM and a waif-like Samsung Syncmaster 171P, designed by F A Porsche and reviewed by us on page 106. We guarantee that if you open up your case and pop everything in, your PC will be as happy as a children's TV presenter. Maybe even happier.

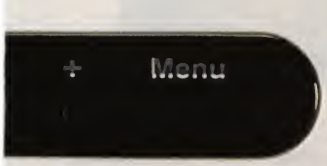
The second prize isn't to be sniffed at. You get an NVIDIA nForce2 motherboard, a slightly less top-end NVIDIA GeForce4 Ti4200 64Mb graphics card, an AMD Athlon XP 2000+ processor and 512Mb RAM. You don't get the flash monitor but then that's the price you pay for being the first loser.

We'd like to make it clear now that *PC ZONE* or Dennis Publishing cannot accept any responsibility for any damage caused to your equipment while attempting the upgrades. If you're not absolutely sure that you can handle the job (and installing a motherboard is not the easiest thing in the world to do) without frying yourself or your PC, then take all the bits to someone who can. It won't cost much, and you'll end up with a top-class system that should last you right through to the end of 2003. Which is a lot better than electrocuting yourself in your mother's back room.

To win, simply tell us a sad story about your current PC.

The saddest sob story of the lot wins the first prize. And the second saddest story wins the second prize. It really is as easy as that.

Your sad story should be no more than 200 words. Write it on the back of a



VER!

postcard and send it to us, but make sure you include the following information:

- Title, forename, surname, address, postcode, daytime phone number and your e-mail address.
- Please indicate on the postcard if you do not wish to receive details of further special offers from companies other than Dennis Publishing Ltd.
- Please indicate on the postcard if you are under 18 years of age.
- Please indicate on the postcard if you are you a current subscriber.

Send your entry to: Sad Story Competition, *PC ZONE*, Dennis Publishing, 30 Cleveland Street, London W1T 4JD (Closing date for entries: September 19 2002)

- Terms and conditions: only entries with all the requested information received before the closing date will be accepted. Winners will be notified by post. No cash alternative. Prizes not necessarily as shown. No correspondence will be entered into. The Editor's decision is final. All the other usual competition rules, conditions and restrictions apply. And all that. Phew!

EXTENDED PLAY

Finishing a game is only the beginning in Extended Play. Maps, mods, add-ons and extras are all here to help you get the most out of what you play

RESTLESS SPIRITS

■ **EXORCIST** Rhianna Pratchett

▲ He may have gone to the land of nappies and puréed broccoli, but the spirit of ex deputy editor Richie Shoemaker still lives on in the *ZONE* offices. Sometimes it will be in the form of a single can of Pepsi Max no one can recall buying, or the fact that anyone who sits in his old chair gets more and more crack-addled with every passing day. Sometimes late at night you can even hear the whispering of "Oh shut up... you know nothing," drifting across the empty office.

While we continue to exorcise his demonic presence by ritually sprinkling Coca-Cola around his desk, you can enjoy the wonders of this month's Extended Play. In The Guide on page 118, new boy Mark Eveleigh shows you how to create skins for *Jedi Knight II*, and you can find all the tools you need to make your own on our cover discs.

Not since Bonnie and Clyde has there been a more passionate pairing then Steve Hill and *Championship Manager*. You'll find him and the Collyer brothers getting sentimental about the Excel spreadsheet's contribution to the beautiful game in Games That Changed The World on page 142. Last but not least, we're sad to say that there's no room for the *Neverwinter Nights* compo this month, but that does give you more time to practice. So warm up that toilet seat and make sure the door is properly locked, because you're going to be here for a while. ▼

Better get your coat, love

ON THE CD DVD

It's suddenly very chilly in Liberty City

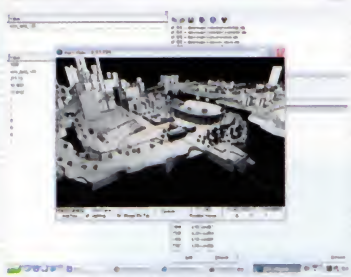
■ http://gta3mods.gameszone.de/modsn.php ■ www.ncgexitus.de.vu/
■ www.rockstargames.com/grandtheftauto3/

If you're sick enough to love the winter, this is the perfect mod for you.

IF YOU'RE tired of gunning down innocents, running over felons in police cars and trying to fly that damned Dodo, we've got a solution. With the mod scene just kicking off for *GTA III*, the Germans are the first to come up with a set of big changes to the game, including a winter mod and a radar-enhancing mod.

Kicking off with the winter mod, those of you who prefer the colder part of the year will be happy to know that the developers have changed more than 1,000 in-game textures to create that chilly winter feel. They've also faithfully converted the day/night system to include shorter days as well as lots of snow.

On the disc this month you'll also find the radar mod, which is quite possibly one of the most useful in-game changes we've encountered in the *GTA III* community. With an enhanced map that has been brightened up to make it much more visible, the radar also allows you to see all of the map's detail, right down to the paths in the park. The worst thing about the default radar was the inability to judge where the overpasses and roads overlapped and with the radar mod fixing this too, the game becomes a lot less frustrating – especially if you're being chased by 17 police cars.



The map editor for *GTA III* is amazing, rendering the whole cityscape for you to modify at will.

Also included on the discs this month is the latest official patch for *GTA III*, which we highly recommend installing given the technical problems some of you appear to be suffering. The patch fixes a number of in-game glitches and should improve slow-down dramatically. Unfortunately, multiplayer *GTA III* is still not a reality but watch this space as a number of third parties are working on an unofficial patch that will add the long-rumoured multiplayer option.

The highlighted map zooms in and out with more clarity than the default radar image.

CHEATS AHOY!

ON THE CD DVD

The old Cheat Master section of these pages may be dead, but we haven't buried it completely. Check out our cover discs where the art of cheating is still very much alive and kicking. You can find all the latest cheats for your favourite games under CheatStation in the Extended Play section of the discs.

This month we've got everything you need to know to cheat your way through *Warcraft III: Reign Of Chaos*, *Sid Meier's Sim Golf*, *Age Of Empires II: The Conquerors*, *Rainbow Six: Urban Operations*, *Thief II: The Metal Age*, *Desperados: Wanted Dead Or Alive* plus gameplay tips for *Diablo II: Lord Of Destruction*.

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FIGHT CLUB
Come and 'ave a go...

The tools of war

Perfect your craft and make war on your own turf
■ www.blizzard.com ■ www.warcraftiii.net/

ON THE CD DVD **THE THIRD** generation of the *Warcraft* saga has finally arrived on UK shores and the Internet has been teeming with ideas for new campaigns, maps and races. One of the first of the new campaigns to come out this month is *Shadows Of Evil*, which has more than a dozen cut-scenes, a full independent story and two mini-games included in the campaign. We couldn't get it on our discs, but you can download it from the link above.

Included on the discs is a patch for *Warcraft III*, which should fix a number of the crashing bugs and balancing issues in the retail release. With Bill Roper suggesting that a full conversion of *Warcraft II* to the *Warcraft III* engine could take as little as a fortnight, you can be sure that there'll be a lot more *Warcraft III* to come from the mod community. We'll be the first to bring you some of the best, including a *Starcraft* total conversion in the coming months.

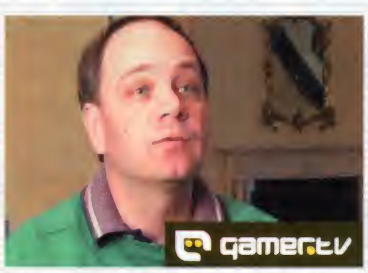
The Shadows campaign map is stunning and uses all the *Warcraft III* visual effects to boast even more beautiful scenery than the Blizzard levels.

Gaming Gods

■ www.gamer.tv

ON THE DVD **IN THE FIRST** of a regular series we're pleased to bring you an interview with gaming god, Sid Meier. You'll need a DVD player or DVD software on your PC to watch the movie, which you can find on our cover DVD. Along with Sid, you'll also find comments from Brian Reynolds, president of Big Huge Games who worked with Sid on *Civilization III*, and Richard Garriot of *Ultima* fame paying tribute to Sid's work.

This interview comes courtesy of our friends at Gamer.TV, and if you fancy more of the same then check out the site at www.gamer.tv. Next month, we'll be bringing you John Romero.



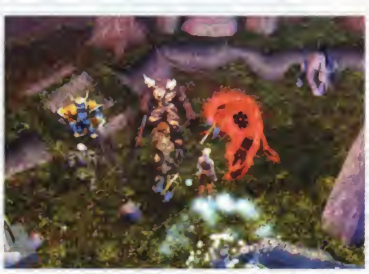
You can blame this man for all those hours spent playing *Civilization*.

Neverwinter Nights

■ www.planetneverwinter.com

ON THE CD DVD **IF YOU'VE** been busy following last month's guide to creating levels in *Neverwinter Nights* and you're thinking of entering our fantastic competition next month, then you might like to see how the pros do it. If that's the case, then take a look at the three official Bioware mods on this month's discs.

All the mods were originally given to those who pre-ordered *Neverwinter Nights*, but now they're available to the rest of us. The first is *The Dark Ranger's Treasure* where you get to explore the Inn of Lance. Then there's *The Winds Of Eremor*, which takes you to the islands of the winds. Finally, check out *To Heir Is Human* – a quest for ranger characters.


Get your RPG kicks with three official mods for *Neverwinter Nights*.

C&C: Renegade

■ http://westwood.ea.com/games/ccuniverse/renegade

ON THE DVD **RENEGADE** brought the *Command & Conquer* universe into the world of the shooter, and even though it's not up there with our favourite FPS titles, it's still an enjoyable if ridiculously gung-ho romp. Multiplayer mode has proved to be one of the biggest saving graces of the game, not least because it manages to conjure up the atmosphere of a true *C&C* battle.

This month you can make your mark in the *Renegade* world with the latest toolset, which you can find on both our CD and DVD editions. The download comes with separate documents detailing how to use the different tools, and comprehensive tutorials on level design can be found on the above website.

***C&C: Renegade*: if you didn't like the original, can you do better?**

SHORTS

HALO BOYS

ON THE DVD It's finally been announced for the PC and the great news is that Gearbox is managing the conversion of Xbox giant *Halo*. If you need reminding how good the game is shaping up to be, check out the trailer put together by developer Bungie on our DVD this month.

MORROWIND PLUG-INS

ON THE CD DVD Another month hails another set of official *Morrowind* plug-ins from Bethesda – and it looks like even more are on their way. This issue, we have the Le Femm armour, which has been specially tailored for female combatants and the Master Index, a quest to find the ten Propylon indices hidden in *Morrowind*.

FEAR FACTOR

ON THE DVD We already set the fear in motion with our *The Thing* preview in issue 113, but now you can see the latest gameplay from what will undoubtedly be the scariest game to grace the PC in full flow. In addition you get to hear from the master of horror himself, John Carpenter, in our exclusive video on this month's DVD.

THE ESSENTIALS

ON THE DVD As part of our *PC ZONE* essentials collection, on this month's DVD you'll find screenshot packs of the most anticipated games in development, including *Colin McRae 3.0*, *Doom III* and *Counter-Strike: Condition Zero*. And don't forget you can also get the latest patches for your favourite games in our patches database.

THE GUIDE: HOW TO CREATE YOUR OWN CHARACTER SKINS

Even if your *Jedi Knight II* skills aren't up to scratch and you never quite get to top that leaderboard, you'll always get noticed in a tutu. *Mark Eveleigh* shows you how

There are many custom models available online if you don't want to use the default ones.

Skinning takes time and patience. Respect skinners.

WHEN YOU start out in the gaming world, you only have your gaming prowess and the speed of your broadband connection to separate you from the rest of the world. You'll undoubtedly trawl through the usual PC games to get your grounding, from *Half-Life* and *Counter-Strike* to *Quake III* and *Unreal Tournament*, before mastering the latest wave of titles. Before that, maybe, you might've been around long enough to remember *Doom*'s initial release and *Duke Nukem* after it. The one way to highlight your existence to the upper echelons of gaming pros was to modify your skin in these titles, and with the coming of *UT 2003*, *Doom III* and *Halo*, it's all going to get that little bit more realistic.

Before you start thinking about skinning your character in a game, you'll need to think about which character model best represents your character. Using *JKII* for our example, you wouldn't want to make a model of yourself using the Desann skin: it's just not human. Start up a multiplayer game and throw in a couple of your favourite models. Then join the game as a spectator to see what the animations are like. Once you've found the one with the best lightsaber animations and your preferred shape, open up the pak file in the base directory and make a copy of that model leaving the skin files themselves untouched.

When you open the skin files themselves, you'll notice that

OPENING YOUR PAK

To access the files you'll need for skinning the models in *JKII*, you'll need first to go to the game directory and then go into gamedata/base. In there you will find two files, named assets0.pk3 and assets1.pk3. Make a copy of assets0.pk3 and then change the file extension to .zip (you'll need file extensions to be visible within Windows to do this). Open the .zip file using WinZip, which you can find on our cover DVD and extract the files to a convenient directory.

Once inside this directory, go into the /models/players/ directory and then double-click on the folder named after the model that you want to use. There are some models in here that can't be used in multiplayer. It's important to make sure you choose one that's available from the character selection menu when setting up your player in-game.

In some online games, skins can be downloaded to your system while you join the server, allowing you to see customised skins on other players' systems.

In the future, skins are going to get even more complicated to map around massively complex models.

Games like *GTAIII* are easy to skin – all you need to do is edit one image file.

they're distorted and surrounded by black space. That's because the skin is wrapped around the 3D mesh model, which is what makes it look distorted. Take note of where certain parts of the skin file morph into others. For example, a head is cut in half and duplicated. Then it is wrapped around the model to create a symmetrical mask. In *JKII*, most of the models use only two or three skin files including the legs and boots, the torso and the head. Complicated models such as Desann also have separate hands, tunics and necks to be modified.

Having chosen the model you'd like to design a skin for, start to conceptualise what you want your finished character to look like, either by drawing it or by taking elements of inspiration from your favourite games characters. You'll need to decide on which colours you'll need to use for the deathmatch model, while also thinking about red and blue versions for team games. You can also come up with an idea for the icon that you'd like to use for your skin from the model selection.

While it's possible to make a skin using free software that comes with Windows, your best bet is to get hold of a copy of either Paintshop Pro or Adobe Photoshop. We've used Photoshop in the tutorial over the page, but you can use the same techniques in any similar piece of software.

GOING ALL THE WAY

Now that you've learnt how to skin a model, why not go all out and create your own model? Using 3D Studio Max, you can create and develop any kind of character and animate their moves to include in any game, from *Quake III* to *Doom III*. If you've got time on your hands and are willing to learn, install the cut-down G-Max on our cover DVD and start designing.

Creating a model is complicated, so don't take it lightly. While in *JKII* you don't need to animate your models, some games will require you to set up a complete set of physics for your model – so take into account the weight of limbs, the speed of movement and in games like *Unreal Tournament 2003* – you'll even need to set up 'bones' that allow your model super-realistic movement.

Another thing to take into account when building your own model is that you will need to configure how the mesh will be skinned, using Notepad to edit the appropriate .cfg files within the pak file.

Once you've prepared everything, open up G-Max and build your model. While G-Max doesn't have some of the more powerful rendering tools of 3DS Max, it does contain everything necessary to build an in-game model from scratch. All that's left now is to get building your model and export a mesh to skin using our tutorial.

MODELLING ON A SHOESTRING

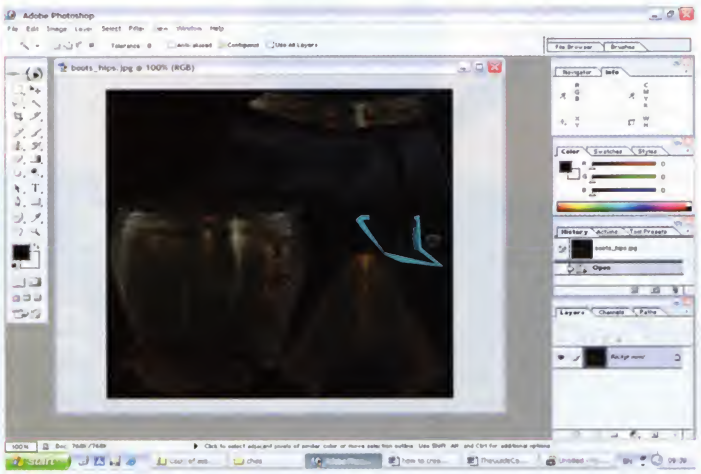
THE SECOND-BEST THINGS IN LIFE ARE FREE

If you can't afford a full copy of 3DS Max from Discreet, you may want to try G-Max. G-Max is a cut-down version of 3DS Max that uses the same technology and comes free of charge from the same developers. While it doesn't have the same rendering power as its bigger brother, G-Max has all you need to build or modify character models without the damage to your wallet. You'll find a copy of G-Max on the cover DVD this month.

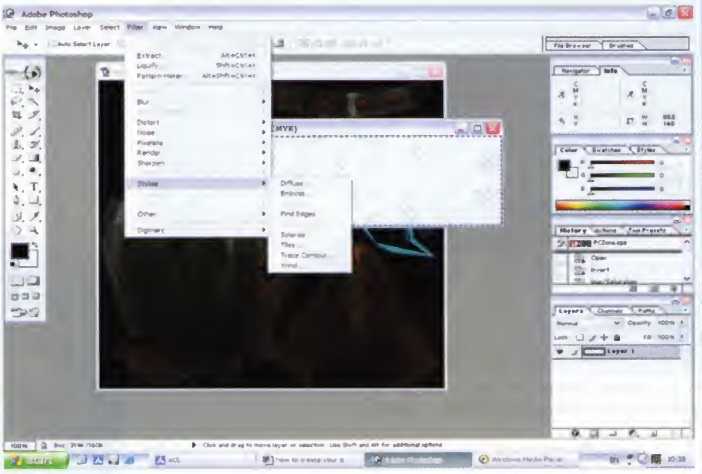
The Karma technology that powers the new *Unreal* engine is impressive in its design physics. With realistic skeletal movement, models are seamlessly animated.

WALKTHROUGH →

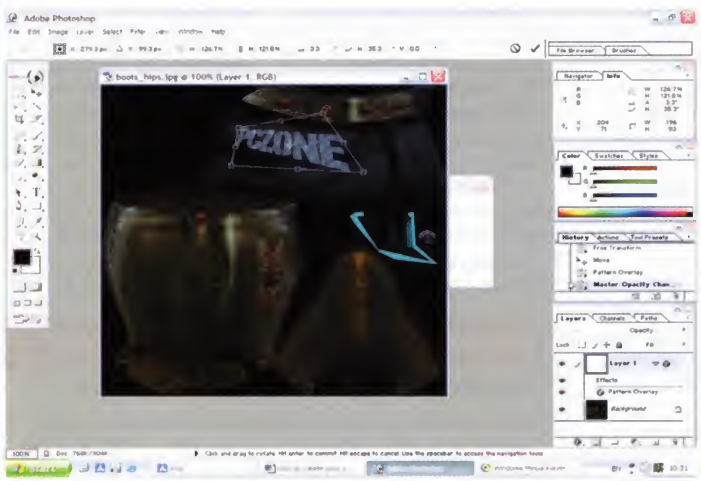
VIRTUAL PLASTIC SURGERY You too could be as beautiful as *Jedi Knight II*



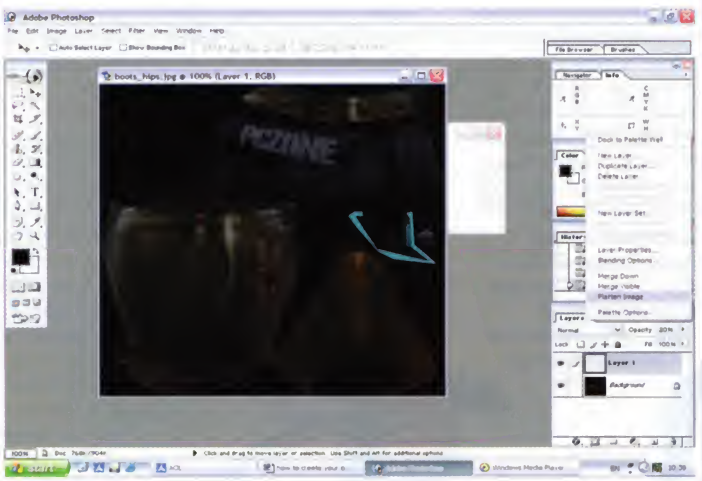
1 Initially, you'll need to open the skin files that you want to edit for your model. In this case, we've chosen the Chiss model and we're going to leave the head, eyes and mouth as they are while altering the boots, hips, legs and torso. Be sure to make a back-up of the files before you begit to modify them.



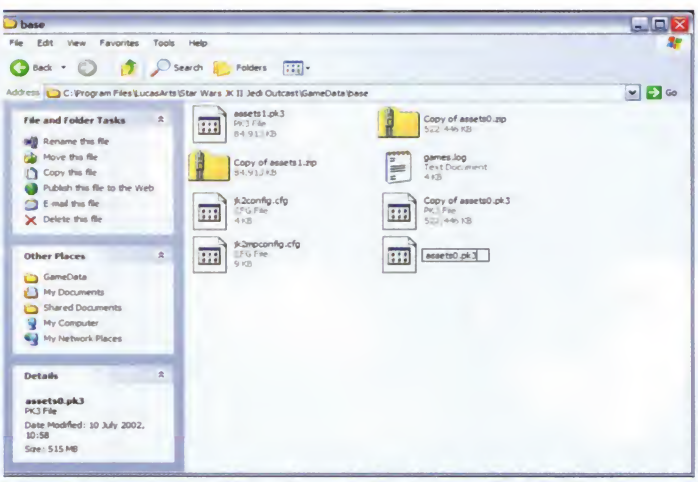
2 For this one, we're going to add a familiar logo to the skin. First we need to modify it a little, so we're going to copy it to the Chiss skin and apply some texture effects in Photoshop. You can do this using the filters menu at the top of the screen and choosing an appropriate effect.



3 Use the transform tools to skew your textures to line up with the original template underneath. As we're modifying this skin with the original textures, we also need to blend the layer to the template beneath. You can do this using the opacity bar in the layer window and adjusting the opacity to around 40 per cent.



4 Now that we've blended the modified texture, we need to flatten down the image with the layers window on the right. Do this using the arrowhead menu in the layer window and the image should become one layer. Now save out the image using the same filename and extension.



5 Once you've completed both files, keeping the original file name, zip up the assets folders into assets0.pk3 again. Ensure that there aren't any file extensions hidden in the folder options window. Replace the folder in the base directory and start *JKII*.

6 Choose the appropriate player model from the *JKII* options menu and set up a deathmatch with a couple of bots on your system. You'll now get to see what your skin looks like in-game. Just set up a game with you and a bot using the same model and skin combination and marvel at your creation.

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www.pcpro.co.uk

THE MODSQUAD

It's a mod, mod world for *Tony Lamb*

Maps are superb, and a close-quarter ambush is always fun.

Mr Hanks! Mr Hanks! Is it my line yet?

DAY OF DEFEAT 3.0

ON THE CD DVD **SIZE** 150Mb **REQUIRES** Needs full version of *Half-Life*
■ www.dayofdefeatmod.com

FEW MODS have had such an impact with the online *Half-Life* gaming community as *Day Of Defeat*. Old favourites *Counter-Strike* and *TFC* spring to mind of course, but despite their avid following (*CS* in particular) they're getting a bit long in the tooth. Even *Counter-Strike* can now be modded with the Fusion pack weaponry add-ons, so it must be getting on a bit.

So, putting these beloved but slightly geriatric mods to one side for a moment, what's so great about the upstart World War II-themed *DoD*? Well, this is one mod that it has been a real pleasure to watch. Starting from humble beginnings as did *Counter-Strike*, the first public releases of the class-based *Day Of Defeat* were fun but they didn't really grab you by the nuts, figuratively speaking. The maps were OK but not awe-inspiring, the character models and animation slightly wooden. The gameplay was almost run-of-the-mill deathmatch with Allied and Axis soldier skins. The whole mod just didn't quite gel. It was neat, but... not quite a star.

Later, as the development team beavered away at *DoD 2.0*, the plan all came together. The detail levels shot up, the mod developed an immersive and imposing atmosphere all of its own which began to rival the best around, and background noises became an intrinsic part of the game instead of something that just happened. Then voice support appeared and online server numbers improved so much that getting a good game was never a problem. Now *Day Of Defeat* was coming of age. We'd always thought that it was destined for great things and here was the proof. "Sod *Wolfenstein*!" a few voices cried. "We're off to play *Day Of Defeat* instead".

Now version 3.0 is upon us. New features include objective-based gameplay, the ability to mix one-life-per-round and respawning teams, new spectator modes, more maps and yet more atmosphere (as if that's possible – the D-Day map is only missing scratch-and-sniff cordite and burning flesh smells to make it almost as harrowing as actually being there). It's truly impressive. There are of course other WWII mods but none can offer the sheer class of *Day of Defeat* and it's up to the likes of *Return To Castle Wolfenstein* (sort of) and the excellent *Medal Of Honor* to offer it any real opposition. These, though, are full-priced games and you expect satisfaction for your money. *DoD* of course is free (install from our disc and even a download charge can't come back to haunt you) and in some ways offers an even better online experience than its expensive competitors. Ninety-nine per cent of mods aren't a commercial enterprise, but a labour of love, and *DoD* shows that sort of devotion by the bucketful. It's a top-class shooter and an absolute essential. Try it now!

***Day of Defeat*'s animations are a treat.**

Attention to detail is second to none.

Sniper rifles are effective, but you rarely get to use them.

PCZONE VERDICT 93

Spielberg would be proud – give it an Oscar

Hello, is that Guns 'R' Us? I'd like a catalogue...

Eminem lookalike cannon fodder. Who's Slim Shady now, eh?

EXISTENCE BETA 1.4

ON THE DVD **SIZE** 68Mb **REQUIRES** Full version of *Half-Life*
■ www.whatisexistence.com

THIS interesting mod deserves a lot more than its current paltry level of online support. In *Existence*, there are two opposing factions to choose from – Agents and Rebels – and they battle to the death in a pretty regulation TDM way. As soon as you die though, you'll notice an unusual twist.

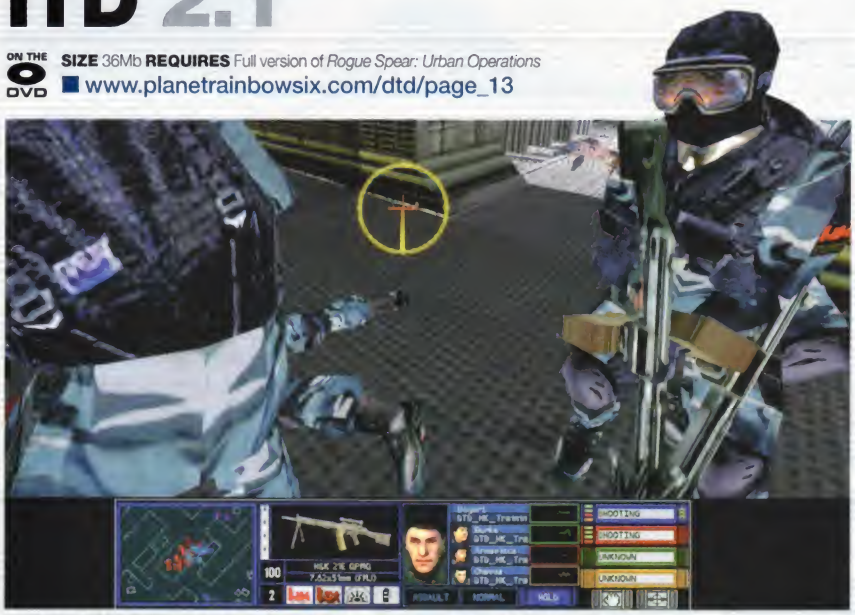
Existence runs in a timed-round format like *Counter-Strike*, but when you die you'll quickly be respawned as a bystander with a minimal amount of health, a pistol, and a very short life expectancy. If you're good then you might last until the next round, but if not then you'll get to die a lot. Weapons are neat, but limited, and you have to earn them. Beginning with a pistol, knife and mobile phone (which is itself used for ordering new weapons and abilities), you can graduate to twin Berettas, twin Uzis, shotguns and more. Get enough points and a Gatling gun is available too.

Maps are impressive and well detailed, with a classy mix of indoor and large outdoor spaces. Overall, this is an enjoyable mod with some novel features, held back by a lack of online support.

PCZONE VERDICT 72
Fun, but needs servers

HECKLER & KOCH ITD 2.1

ON THE DVD **SIZE** 36Mb **REQUIRES** Full version of *Rogue Spear: Urban Operations*
■ www.planetrainbowsix.com/dtd/page_13



***Heckler & Koch ITD* has a wealth of weaponry for gun nuts everywhere.**

THE NAME of firearms manufacturer Heckler & Koch has become a byword for special forces firepower. Take their MP5, for example. It's almost obligatory kit for close-quarter scrapping online – just look at how many mods feature a variant in their weapons list.

Here, then, is nirvana for the HK fan, with the familiar MP5 joined by no less than 95 other weapons (including, of course a good range of MP5 versions), as well as a range of new and shockingly effective hollow-point, armour-piercing and fragmentation ammo types.

This mod isn't only about new weapons though, as players get half a dozen funky new uniforms to run around in. These are needed because for all its impressive attention to detail – a real trademark of these DTD *Urban Ops* mods – there aren't any new maps or scenarios to enjoy. This is a shame, as the DTD team have proven they have a knack for mission-creation too, but here the emphasis is on modelling accuracy, and the standard is as high as ever.

PCZONE VERDICT 69
Guns, guns, guns

The West was pretty boring before Clint Eastwood came along.

WANTED! 1.5 + 1.6 PATCH

ON THE CD DVD **SIZE** 126Mb total **REQUIRES** Full version of *Half-Life*
■ www.wantedhl.com

THIS IS A fantastic mod and patch for *Half-Life* from Maverick Developments. *Wanted!* sees you swapping your HEV suit for a Stetson and chaps, before setting off to do battle in the American Old West. A total conversion that couldn't be further from the original game, this is one of very few mods to feature such a setting. It does it very well too, plonking you into the role of Rogan Black as you go through town, mine, Mexican and mountain environments, confronting nasty characters all the while.

Wanted! features no less than 40 single-player levels and each is chock-full of those well-modelled characters. As well as that, snakes, scorpions, pumas and bears add to the element of danger already facing you.

Don't expect *Wanted!* to be easy – it isn't – and it should keep you amused for a good while before you finally get to slip off your spurs and relax. Multiplayer is catered for too, with 11 deathmatch levels, bot support (yes!) and even the option to shoot it out in a duel. Excellent stuff.

PCZONE VERDICT 89
Fill your hands you sonofabitch!

DISC PAGES

DISCS Mark Eveleigh
WORDS Mark Eveleigh

HELP!

CD trouble? Don't worry – phone our helpline on **08701 711 482**. The line is open weekdays between 9.30am and 5pm, and Saturday from 10am to 2pm, **or email pc_zone@interchange.co.uk**
BEFORE YOU DIAL... If you are calling the helpline:

- If possible, have your PC operating and near the phone when you call.
- If this is not possible, note down all relevant information – ie system type, soundcard, RAM and so on – plus the nature of the fault.
- Have a pen and paper to hand, so you can jot down the relevant info.

MINIMUM SPECIFICATION

- You need at least a P266 with 32Mb RAM to run the software on the discs. Please note that some games also require a 3D accelerator card.
- Use the browser and menu system to see which demos are 3D accelerator only.

DISCLAIMER

- This disc has been thoroughly tested at all stages of its production. However, it is always wise to use a virus checker on any software before running it.
- Dennis Publishing Limited cannot accept any responsibility for any loss, disruption or damage to your data or your computer system (including hardware) that may occur while using either the disc or programs and data on it.

BATTLEFIELD 1942

CD2/DVD Pub: Electronic Arts

There was a hefty quota of WWII titles at this year's E3, but there is one that really stood out from the rest, and *Battlefield 1942* is it. Although it has a solid multiplayer team-based focus, this single-player demo should still give you an inkling of what's to come when it hits the shelves next month.

This demo is set in Tobruk, the scene of one of Rommel's greatest successes in the North African campaign before Montgomery thwarted his efforts at El Alamein. A barren desert landscape means you'll have to make use of potholes, trenches and scattered bunkers to survive.

Your objective is to secure all the outposts, which to begin with are almost all occupied by the allies. However, playing as the allies isn't any easier. The German outpost is a large factory with several machine gun batteries and tanks at the ready. The allies have a few resources spread between a small base and five outposts.

Steal enemy self-propelled guns for extra artillery firepower.

The M7 priest is a howitzer that packs an almighty punch.

You'll need back-up if you plan on taking over an outpost.

The first thing to do is rush to the front and either commandeer a vehicle or get behind a bunker machine gun post. The enemy will probably flank you instead of going straight for your outpost, so make sure you know what's coming for you and which defenses you have on your radar.

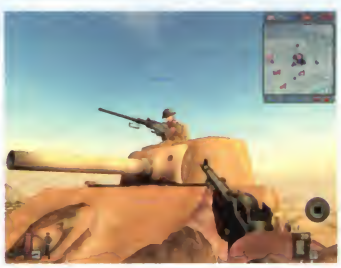
As long as you keep your side's flag flying you should be OK, but you'll also need to check the map regularly to ensure all the outposts are still safe. If not, hop into the nearest vehicle, call over a gunner and go like hell. As well as tanks, you can control heavy artillery units and howitzers. In the final game, air and sea units will also be at your disposal.

WALKTHROUGH →

It's time to stop Rommel long before Monty and the Desert Rats get their chance

1 Get moving, soldier. Once you have chosen a class and a spawning point, get yourself a vehicle. A Sherman tank is always a good bet.

2 Start pulverising the enemy with those shells. You needn't worry about having a gunner when taking on enemy vehicles, so feel free to fire away.

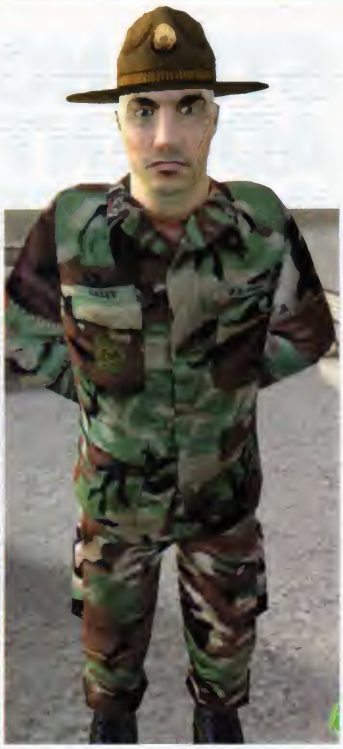


3 With the enemy vehicles taken care of, find the rest of your men and get a gunner, it's time to clean up the last remnants of the enemy forces.

4 Get out of your tank, rush the bunker and the outpost is yours. Forget folding the flag properly and saluting, gear up and get on to the next one.

AMERICA'S ARMY

CD1/DVD Pub: US Army



"Welcome to the Army soldier. Please choose your complementary rifle in return for filling out that application form."

"Whatever you say, sir."

With propaganda practically bleeding from the screen, *America's Army* is here, and after a quick registration you'll be able to get past the rifle range and onto combat scenarios. Conforming to the iron will of the US Army's instructors, you must first pick up your gun and prove you can shoot things without turning into a psychotic Rambo who turns on their teammates.

One thing to be aware of is that you must follow the rules of engagement set out by the US Army. Things you are not allowed to do include using derogatory or slanderous names, excessive use of vulgar language, purposely opening fire on teammates, purposely disorientating teammates with smoke grenades or flashbangs, standing in passageways to purposely block teammates and spamming chat or voice commands. The penalty if you don't stick to the rules? Removal from the server and imprisonment for your character. Well, that's one way to discipline online gamers.

If ever there was a way to demoralise your squad at the beginning of the season, this is certainly it.

TOTAL CLUB MANAGER 2003

CD1/DVD Pub: Electronic Arts

The new footie season begins and with it comes the next wave of life-absorbing footie management sims, led by EA's *Total Club Manager 2003*. Featuring the latest stats and all your favourite clubs, this demo allows you to manage any team in the English Premier League.

Unfortunately, you won't be able to simulate international management, and grudge matches such as England vs Argentina will have to wait for an update. But that doesn't stop you from selling the poorer performers in your squad to rivals, before getting in Rivaldo to up your stats.

IMPERIUM GALACTICA III: GENESIS

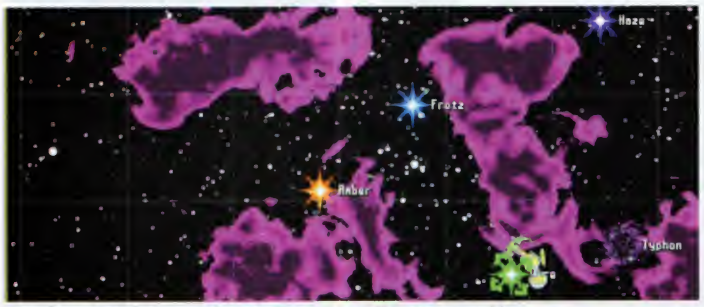
CD1/DVD Pub: CDV

Be careful when navigating the asteroid field where the first battle takes place.

The next episode of the *Imperium Galactica* series is almost upon us and before our huge demo next month comes this early build, optimised for the new Matrox Parhelia graphics card. Easily the most visually stunning game of the series so far, *IG III* features some of the best combat sequences yet seen rendered on your PC. Watch out for next month's updated demo with even more features.

STRANGE ADVENTURES IN INFINITE SPACE

CD1/DVD Pub: Digital Eel



Watch out for the black holes, they generally mean trouble.

Occasionally, a developer comes out of nowhere with a simple idea for a demo that captivates you for hours. Quirky developer Digital Eel has come up with a winning formula in the form of *Strange Adventures In Infinite Space*, a simple space exploration game that will have you trading with, employing and fighting alien species in order to upgrade your ship and progress through each star system.

MOTOGP

CD2/DVD Pub: THQ **Reviewed:** Issue 119 (72%)

The detailed tarmac looks great. Pray you don't hit it though.

For those of you with a passion for all things on two wheels *MotoGP* is here. Featuring all the main riders from the MotoGP 2001 season, you can choose one of three bikes to race on the single track available, as you try to stay alive while keeping up the pace to win.

The AI opponents are tough, but if you watch their breaking, you should be able to cut-in and overtake on some of the faster bends. The game has a distinctly arcade feel to it, which may disorientate you to begin with, but the sense of speed is amazing.

PANZER ELITE

CD2/DVD Pub: JoWooD

Shells take time to reload, so don't get caught out in the open unarmed.

Although not as accomplished as *Battlefield 1942*, *Panzer Elite* is yet another WWII-themed title, this time focusing on tank combat. Patrolling the countryside under the Allied banner, it's your job to clear out the invading Germans with a barrage of shells as you plough through the enemy units.

ANOTHER WAR

DVD Pub: Cenega

You need to distract the officers to get past.

We'd like to say this looks a bit like *Commandos*, but apart from the isometric perspective it's more like *'Allo 'Allo*. This RPG takes place in Europe during the WWII era and, to continue a theme, features a tank. Unfortunately there are no dirty waitresses for Renee this time round.

XTREME AIR RACING

CD2/DVD Pub: Just Flight

418mph, 568ft from the ground. One mistake and you're dead.

If you fancy yourself as a bit of a daredevil pilot, then *Xtreme Air Racing* may be the perfect game for you. Flying one of two propeller planes through a circuit of hoops at break-neck speed might only have been a dream to you before, but with this demo it is possible. As is crashing and burning.

HAEGEMONIA ROLLING DEMO

CD1/DVD Pub: Wanadoo

Now that's an explosion.

Even the little pieces explode.

If you're looking for something that'll best show off your new graphics card to your mates, you need only install this rolling demo of *Haegemonia: Legions Of Iron*. It features some of the most gorgeous visuals we've ever seen, and is guaranteed to not disappoint. And the best thing is it's all rendered using the in-game engine.

TEAM FACTOR UPDATED MULTIPLAYER DEMO

DVD Pub: Codemasters **Reviewed:** Issue 118 (49%)

More *Team Factor* action is headed your way this month, with a whole new map set in Sarajevo. It contains a multitude of fixes, so anyone who had problems with the last demo should give this one a try as various graphical and bug fixes are included.

EXTENDED PLAY CD2

Command & Conquer Renegade Tools
GTA III Patch v1.1
GTA III Radar Mod
Morrowind Official Plug-In:
Lefemm Armour
Morrowind Official Plug-In:
Master Index
Neverwinter Nights Official Plug-In:
The Dark Ranger's Treasure
Neverwinter Nights Official Plug-In:
The Winds Of Eremor
Neverwinter Nights Official Plug-In:
To Heir Is Human

PATCHES CD1

Civilization III v1.29f
Etherlords v1.07
Mobile Forces Patch
Soldier Of Fortune II: Double Helix
Star Wars: Galactic Battlegrounds
Clone Campaigns v1.1
Warcraft III: Reign Of Chaos v1.1

MOD WATCH CD2

Day Of Defeat 3.0

DEMOS CD2

Battlefield 1942
Big Scale Racing
MotoGP: Ultimate Racing Technology
Xtreme Air Racing
Panzer Elite
DEMOS CD1
America's Army
Imperium Galactica III
Strange Adventures In Infinite Space
Haegemonia Rolling Demo
Total Club Manager 2003

MOVIES CD2

Colin McRae Rally 3 Driving
Conditions Movie
Colin McRae Rally 3 Crew Report Movie
Colin McRae Rally 3 Vehicle
Showcase Movie
Delta Force: Black Hawk Down
Earth & Beyond
Master of Orion III
Sim City 4
Stalker: Oblivion Lost

EXTENDED PLAY CD1

Cheatstation

DVD EXCLUSIVES

THE CONTENT ON THIS PAGE IS ONLY AVAILABLE ON THE DVD EDITION OF PC ZONE. TO SUBSCRIBE AND GET A PACKED DVD EVERY MONTH, TURN TO PAGE 131

DVD EXCLUSIVE VIDEO

Game Gods: Sid Meier Interview
The Thing: John Carpenter Interview

PATCHES

Command & Conquer Renegade
English Update
Neverwinter Nights Manual
Patch v1.21
Starmageddon: Project Earth

SCREENSHOT PACKS

Colin McRae 3.0
Command & Conquer: Generals
Counter-Strike: Condition Zero
Doom III
Freelancer
Halo
IGI 2: Covert Strike
James Bond 007: Nightfire
Mafia
Neverwinter Nights
Star Wars: Galaxies
Star Wars: Knights Of The
Old Republic
Unreal II: The Awakening
Unreal Tournament 2003

MODS

Day of Defeat 3.0

MOD WATCH

Thievery Beta 1.0
Defense Alliance Beta 1.5
Existence Beta 1.4
Heckler & Koch ITD 2.1
Wanted! 1.5

MOVIES

Driver 3
Medieval: Total War
Platoon
TOCA Race Driver Car Showcase Movie
War And Peace

EXTENDED PLAY

Extended Play
CheatStation
Command & Conquer Renegade
English Update
Command & Conquer
Renegade Tools
Grand Theft Auto III Mapper 2.2
Grand Theft Auto III patch v1.1
Grand Theft Auto III Radar Mod
Halo PC Trailer
Morrowind Official Plug-In:
Lefemm Armour
Morrowind Official
Plug-In: Master
Index
Neverwinter
Nights Manual
Patch v1.21
Neverwinter
Nights Official
Plug-In: The
Dark Ranger's
Treasure
Neverwinter
Nights Official
Plug-In:
The Winds
Of Eremor

Neverwinter Nights Official Plug-In:
To Heir Is Human
Warcraft III: Reign Of Chaos v1.1b

ESSENTIAL PATCHES

Age of Empires II v2.0a
Aliens Vs Predator 2 v1.0.9.6
Baldur's Gate II: Shadows Of Amn v23037
Ballistics v1.0.1
Battle of Britain Patch 2
Black & White v1.20
C&C: Red Alert 2 v1.006
C&C Renegade English Update
Civilization III v1.29f
Colin McRae Rally 2.0 v1.05
Commandos 2 v1.2
Counter-Strike Mod v1.5
Counter-Strike Retail
v1.0.0.5
Crimson Skies v1.02
Deus Ex v1.112fm
Diablo II v1.09d
Escape From
Monkey Island
Giants v1.4
Grand Prix 3 v1.13
Grand Theft Auto III v1.1
Half-Life v1.1.1.0
Hidden & Dangerous v1.3
Hostile Waters v1.03
Jane's F/A 18 v1.01f
Jedi Knight II: Jedi
Outcast v1.04
Jimmy White's
Cueball 2 v1.07
Medal Of Honor:
Allied Assault v1.11
Midtown Madness 2 v1.1
The Elder Scrolls III: Morrowind v1.1.0605
Neverwinter Nights Manual Patch v1.21
Operation Flashpoint: Cold War
Crisis v1.46
Project Eden v1.01
Quake III Arena Point Release 1.31
Return To Castle Wolfenstein v1.33
Soldier Of Fortune II: Double Helix
Soul Reaver 2 v1.02
The Sims v1.1
Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 3 v1.01
Virtua Tennis v1.1
Warrior Kings v1.2 to 1.3
Warcraft III: Reign of Chaos v1.1b

ESSENTIAL DRIVERS

Detonator XP 29.42 drivers for
NVIDIA cards
Videologic Vivid!XS card drivers

ESSENTIALS

3DMark2001 Second Edition
Adobe Acrobat Reader 5.0.5
(with search capability)
DirectX 8.1b for Windows 2000
DirectX 8.1b for Windows 98/
Millenium Edition
GetRight 4.5d
gmax
HyperSnap-DX 4.50.03
Trillian 0.725
Winsock 2
WinZip 8.1
ZoneAlarm 2.6.362

FIGHT CLUB

Membership is limited to those who like taking their aggression out on others on *PC ZONE*'s servers, the Free-For-All or at LAN parties. *Martin Korda* tells all

Stop running away you cowards and come and fight us online.

ONCE AGAIN, the monthly *PC ZONE* Readers' Free-For-All enjoyed a huge turnout. And the level of excellence just seems to be getting higher and higher, with many of the *ZONE* boys reduced to running aimlessly around each level while being picked off with consummate ease by this month's star players. However, our very own Mark 'Leatherface' Hill kept things respectable with a string of superb performances to even things out a little. Star players this month include some Free-For-All veterans as well as a selection of talented new comers. They were (in no discernible order) – Kreed, Camaro, ReNt-A-kiLL, iLLa, Shotgun Benny, wall, [GM]Martin [GUN] and fez. Think you're good enough to join their ranks? Then brand Thursday September 12 onto your forearms, and when the day arrives jump into the Free-For-All and have a go. From now on, anyone who appears in the Star Players' list more than five times will enter the *PC ZONE* Hall of Fame (starting with this month's list), so get practicing and we'll see you online.

FREE-FOR-ALL

THURSDAY 12 SEPT

6.30pm – 9.00pm

***Counter-Strike* server**

KNOW YOUR ENEMY

Dave Woods	Kid Unknown
Richie Shoemaker	Zapatero
Martin Korda	Nameless One
Anthony Holden	Shokupan
Mark Hill	Leatherface
Paul Presley	I R Baboon
Lee Cocker	Viper
Phil Clark	Shit Kicker
Danny King-Smith	Ronin
Colin Mackleworth	M.A.C.H.I.N.E.

PC ZONE GAME SERVERS POWERED BY JOLT.CO.UK

OUR SERVERS ARE OPEN 24/7 AND FREE OF CHARGE. WHY PLAY ANYWHERE ELSE?

We've switched our game servers to the the ultra-fast Jolt service, which means lag should now be a thing of the past. We've also changed the way you find them, and from now on we'll refer to them by their name rather than by their address. The easiest way to connect is to load the game you wish to play, go to the multiplayer connection screen and instead of typing in an IP address, type in the name of the server from the list below. They can also be accessed from a server browser such as The All-Seeing Eye or GameSpy. Remember to use the password below, which is updated each month.

Team Fortress Classic Public Server #1 – [24hr 2fort]: *tfc.zonegames.co.uk:27025*
TFC Public Server #2 – [24hr Badlands]: *tfc.zonegames.co.uk:27035*

Quake III: Threewave: *q3.zonegames.co.uk:27970*

Counter-Strike Public Server #1 [All maps]: *cszonegames.co.uk:27015*
Counter-Strike Public Server #2 – [3De_]: *cszonegames.co.uk:27025*

Counter-Strike Public Server #3 – [DualDust]: *cszonegames.co.uk:27035*
Counter-Strike Public Server #4 – [Classics]: *cszonegames.co.uk:27045*

Unreal Tournament Public Server: *ut.zonegames.co.uk:7807*

Wolfenstein Public Server: *rtcw.zonegames.co.uk:27960*

PASSWORD: **operation**

LAN ROVER

LAN LORD STEVE 'SCALPER' RANDALL KNOWS WHERE THE PARTY'S AT

There are LANs going on all over the country this month as everyone tries to get you out of the house before the school holidays have finished...

■ There's the Stratlan 10, which has just 54 seats from August 23-27 for £45 in Stratford-Upon-Avon. Info can be found at www.multiplay.co.uk
■ Next an apology to www.inknet.uk.com who are an unmanned dedicated Gaming Café in Worcestershire. I missed the August plug but must say their site is worth looking at. They have regular LANs for £10 a weekend or £15 if you hire one of their machines.
■ On August 31-September 1 there's a LAN party in Watford by www.lanarchy.co.uk. It's £15 a head for a maximum of 50 attendees.
■ My next LAN will be in October, but because I'm hoping a lot of people will come, I thought I'd better plug it early. It's £30 a head, but if you book before the end of August it will only cost you £25. More details can be found at www.GGLAN.CO.UK.
■ Following the recent i12, the next LAN event is strangely titled i14 (not superstitious then?). It will be another 600-player event in Newbury, taking place on November 15-17. Details again at www.multiplay.co.uk.

If you want your LAN party mentioned here, give me two months notice and send me some beer and bribes to stevie@arsenalfc.net. Wherever you play, whatever you play, enjoy. Scalper out.

FREE-FOR-ALL CONNECTION DETAILS

Connecting to our Free-For-All Server is extremely simple. And to make things easier still, we have given the server a permanent home. To hook up from within the game, open the *Half-Life* console and type password *pczone* and then press enter. After this type *connect ffa.zonegames.co.uk* and press enter. You will be taken right there. You can also add the server to popular game browsers such as The All-Seeing Eye or GameSpy 3D by entering *ffa.zonegames.co.uk* where you would normally provide an IP address. If you experience any problems connecting on the night of the Free-For-All then check our forum at www.pczone.co.uk in case of any last-minute changes or information updates.

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MAILBOX

Everybody needs a good rant every now and again, and we're here to listen...

■ **HOLDING COURT** Dave Woods

If you want your games open-ended, *Morrowind* is as good as it gets.

OPEN-MINDED

I've been pleased to see the encouragement your magazine has given to more 'open-ended' games such as *Morrowind*. I like having the freedom to wander, but I think it should be taken a step further. The problem with *Morrowind* is that although the option to wander off from the main quest is great, there are no real consequences. I can get a set of orders from one guy and then disappear for a few weeks. When I get back, he's still there patiently waiting for me, when all he wanted to do was run across town and pick up some information. You'd think by that time he'd have found someone else to do it or gone himself.

I'm looking forward to the day when it's possible to fail at a game and then have to deal with the consequences. Imagine if in *Morrowind* I left it too late to get back to the main quest and whatever nasty evil is waiting had won. I'd then need to figure out what to do – embark on a suicidal solo crusade, or try to rally resistance?

Pete Morfill

You're asking a lot. Games and the technology that drive them are still in their infancy. You want open-ended games with a structure and the ability to foresee absolutely any and every action you might take, but it just isn't going to happen. Not for a long time.

A-HOLES

Has anybody noticed the close likeness of Tim from *Big Brother 3* and Max Payne? While at my local game emporium, I showed my girlfriend the box art and she agreed it did look like Tim – the same quiff, the same sideburns.

I've also got a petty nag: in the review for the *Sky Sports Quiz* game, you misspelt Kirsty Gallacher, as Gallagher. Get it right, she's a babe and deserves the correct spelling you chipsticks. Peace and tranquillity to all at *PC ZONE*.

Howard aka MarsArse

But which one's the arrogant arsehole?

That's where the similarity ends, though. Max was pushed over the edge by the loss of his family, Tim was pushed over the edge by the fact that he couldn't roller-boogie. Comprendez?

GAME ON

I saw the article for the 'Game On' exhibition in *PC ZONE* and felt compelled to go along and see it for myself, during a recent trip to London. The exhibition covers a history of computer games and the show made me realise how the computer games industry has evolved. In the space of 35 years we've gone from black and white blobs on a screen to fully believable 3D worlds. However, the most striking thing about the exhibition was the venue: The Barbican Art Exhibition Centre. Surely proof once and for all that computer games are an accepted art form.

P Robertson

We're glad you enjoyed it. Now if I could blow my own trumpet just this once, did you see the framed issue of *PC ZONE*, commemorating the fact that we're the longest-running games mag in the UK?

THE DEAD HAVE DIED

OK, this is my first letter to you. Firstly, great mag. Secondly, in the July 2001 issue you had a preview of a game called *Necrocide: The Dead Must Die*, saying that its expected release date was summer 2001. But in all your issues since then, there hasn't been so much as a peep

GOT SOMETHING YOU NEED TO GET OFF YOUR CHEST? WRITE TO...

MAILBOX, PC ZONE, 30 CLEVELAND ST, LONDON W1T 4JD, OR EMAIL LETTERS@PCZONE.CO.UK

■ **The Letter of the Month wins a spanking new graphics card courtesy of the lovely people at Creative Labs. The Blaster 4 Titanium 4400 is as good as the name suggests, and sporting the new GeForce 4 chipset, it gives you more bang than a rabbit stuffed with semtex.**

from you about it. What's happened to it?

Robert Ensor

We did report on the fact that *Necrocide* has now been officially canned – you must have missed it.

MECHS PLEASE

I'm writing to enquire about 'mechophobia'. I've seen the phrase in *PC ZONE* a few times and it stumps me. I understand what it is, but I query why it is. I know a sizeable group of English people who like nothing more than to blow things to pieces while striding about in a metal monstrosity (I'm one of them). Why are we in the minority? *MechWarrior 3* was great, *MW4* is brilliant on the Net, so why does it seem to be so unpopular in this country? What is more fun than wandering around blowing metal limbs off people, then trying not to voice the mirth inside as they rant at you for it?

M Hyne

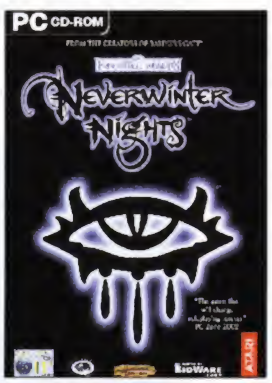
Mr Holden, our resident big robot lover, isn't a big fan of the 'lumbering' US games but loves some of the more bizarre Japanese offerings. Watch out for *Phantom Crash*, a metal behemoth that should be with us around Christmas time.

KER-CHING!

I'm sad to see what can only be described as another cash-in.

After the Christmas price hike fuelled by *Wolfenstein* and *Medal Of Honor* we've now had another in the shape of *Neverwinter Nights*, which costs £39.99. I would have bought this but the publishers have shot themselves in the foot as I'm not prepared to pay this price. I'll wait until it's in a bargain bucket but for now it's back to *Dungeon Siege*. What are your thoughts?

Jai Curtis



***Neverwinter Nights*: bloody good and bloody expensive.**

We hate overpriced games and although we love *Neverwinter Nights* we do think £39.99 is a bit pricey. It's a brilliant game though, and offers more in the box than just a single-player campaign. Have a look on the Internet, and you'll probably find it nearer the £30 mark. Believe me, it's worth that much.

Phantom Crash: Big robots piloted by Japanese schoolgirls with big eyes. Brilliant.

DÉJÀ VU

Beneath all the praise that I could lavish on your magazine, lies one great big crack in your otherwise gamer-friendly veneer – your insistence on putting gamers into neat little categories: hardcore, strategist, console, and worst of all, girl gamers. What next? Black gamers, Asian gamers, or even homosexual or ethnic minority gamer?

I myself fall into your 'girl gamer' bracket and am annoyed that that you segregate us from the rest of your demographic by labelling us as if we need special treatment. The only thing that makes me different from the men in your camp is what's between my legs, nothing more, nothing less.

What difference does it make, what age, race or sex I am, or even what machine I choose to play on?

Emma Stevens

Are you thinking of another magazine? We've just run a Comment piece that reads exactly like your letter, penned by our very own token girl gamer, Rhianna. Here she is:

"Personally I hate the term 'girl gamer', which is the initial reason I wrote the Comment in issue 112. And it's certainly never a term we've used at *PC ZONE*. I think that it's the wider media who are probably to blame for coining such a phrase, simply because they like labels and they tend to lag a few years behind what's actually happening in the world of gaming."

A BREED APART

What's going on? Huge software houses seem to be going down the drain, and it seems this really is the year of the Dark Horse. I am referring to companies such as Brat Designs, a small team and its amazing-looking game, *Breed*. I've never seen a game as ambitious, with an engine that can handle space combat and do a seamless transition for craft to pass through the atmosphere to the planet.

READER REVIEWS

FANCY A CAREER WRITING FOR A GAMES MAG? WELL PRACTICE MAKES PERFECT...

We want reviews of the games you love or the ones you hate. Each one should be between 50 and 350 words and come with a score out of 100. The best one wins a game from the current charts. Send your review to the standard Mailbox address (see boxout) and remember to include your name, address and telephone number.

GRAND PRIX 4

PC ZONE ISSUE 119 – 86%

We Said... "Graphically lush, anally detailed and with some of the best AI to date, it edges out Electronic Arts' offering for pole position."

This game is pants. Total and utter poo-filled pants. I'm a Grand Prix games devotee and have bought all the early versions, from 1 through to 3 (even the very dubious *Season 2000* add-on) and enjoyed them all to a greater or lesser degree. However, *Grand Prix 4* is rubbish. Why? Where do I start?

1. The interface is far more fiddly than before with multiple screens to be ploughed through in order to make the smallest of adjustments.

2. There's far too long a gap between leaving the set-up screen and actually being plonked back in your car.

3. The flat-face twins who lower the car then tell you "Clear" every time you leave the garage are irritating in the extreme and can't be switched off.

4. In a network game you don't get to practice or qualify.

5. Proper race flag rules are still not being implemented correctly.

6. The game struggles to run at anything above 800 x 600 in spite of my Athlon 1200, 512Mb RAM and 64Mb graphics card.

There are more points but I don't want you thinking I'm being picky. Redeeming features? The AI is a big improvement and I suppose the graphics are quite nice if you have a ninja PC – but that's about it.

I used to think the sun rose from a crevice at the rear of Geoff Crammond, but in trying to beat Electronic Arts in the presentation stakes he has forgotten why we ever bought his games in the first place. This effort is seriously flawed, gives the impression of being rushed out and has removed some of the options that were available in previous versions. *GP3* is already back on my hard drive and I'm off to play that instead. Mr Crammond, hang your head in shame.

Martin Conroy

SCORE: 50%

More to the point, why is it that I only heard of this game from your last issue? This is one of the best game designs I've ever seen, and Brat should be applauded for not only raising the bar in their genre, but for pushing it so high other developers will need stepladders just to catch up! Brat Designs, I applaud you! And *PC ZONE*, I applaud you too for bringing it to my attention!

Christian D'Amico

You'll want to watch our next couple of issues then as we're taking a trip up to Brat Designs for an in-depth look at the game we reckon could take everyone by surprise.

We think *Breed* is going to be bloody brilliant.

STAR LETTER

GLORIOUS SOLITUDE

I am a long-time reader, though first-time writer, but I feel compelled to take issue with the almost laughable amount of respect that is given to multiplayer PC gaming, not least by your otherwise splendid organ. I think I speak for a silent majority when I say that it plays little or no part in my gaming intake, and is simply not on my menu. In more than seven years of PC gaming, I have never once used a LAN, nor have I ever had anyone crowd round the monitor with me. As for the much vaunted online experience, I have found it largely frustrating. Too often a tagged-on multiplayer option is no more than a cover-up for a multitude of sins, such as ropy AI and appalling dialogue, which I would rather developers concentrate on getting right.

Besides, why pay to be shredded by some no-life cable user called {[Haxor18]} who may quite possibly be cheating? I would rather play *Quake III* on my own, against bots, on a medium setting, where I am at least guaranteed a fair game against opponents of a similar ability. As for other genres, *Sky Sports Football Manager* was rendered utterly pointless by the lack of human opponents, and *EverQuest* is little more than a glorified chatroom, only without the chat. Unless you consider a request for armoured slippers to be a valid conversational gambit.

I see gaming as a hugely enjoyable way of killing time when nobody else is around. Like cycling, reading and masturbating, it is a hobby that I pursue on an exclusively solo basis, and I am happy for it to remain so. As Greta Garbo once said: "I want to be alone."

Steve Lopez

Why play with others when you can stay in your bedroom, close the curtains and frag solo?

CRAP

Alright *PC ZONE* people? I've been having problems with my PC for a few weeks now. I think it's been overheating. Had to call out an engineer to fix it. Cost me 60 quid. Sixty bloody quid! Anyway, he said it was a case of crap in my fan or something. Thing is, how often do I have to do this? He didn't say.

Any advice would be most appreciated.

PS Send me a prize graphics card. Pleeeease!

Warren Richards

For a joke like that we can offer you an old VGA card that's been sitting in our office for the past seven years.

F'D OFF!

I'm sick and tired of abbreviations all the way through your magazine. During this year I've discovered abbreviations all over the place. First of all it would help if there was a page where you could find the meanings of them instead of guessing. Take RPG, for example. One of the most used abbreviations around. That could mean Rocket-Propelled Grenade for all I know. What's really annoyed me in this month's chart compo is that you're supposed to find what edition of AD&D has been used for *NWN* when I don't have a *clue what it is*!

Do you use these because you can't be bothered typing the whole thing out, or is it just to annoy everyone?

Also, what happens if the whole gaming world turns into one big abbreviation? Instead of *PC ZONE* you'll be *PCZ* and games will be things like *MOH: AA* and *NWN*. And what the hell is a MMORPG?

Gavin Reith

What's a MMORPG? OK, just this once: Massively Multiplayer Online Rocket Propelled Grenade. You were halfway there.

WHEN I WERE A KID...

How many times have you heard people banging on about the 'good old days'? It's fair to say that most of the time they're talking rubbish, but maybe there were some elements of the 'good old days' that were actually quite good. Who can remember their first Rubik's Cube? Simple, but one of the most addictive and successful toys ever. And that's my point. In the world of gaming, playability and originality seem to have been overtaken by the need to show how nice the game looks. Do you think the author of *Jet Set Willy* set out to get the highest frame-rate he could muster from 48k? I doubt it. This never stopped the game from being considered one of the best you could play on a ZX Spectrum. Why are things so different now?

Matt Moby

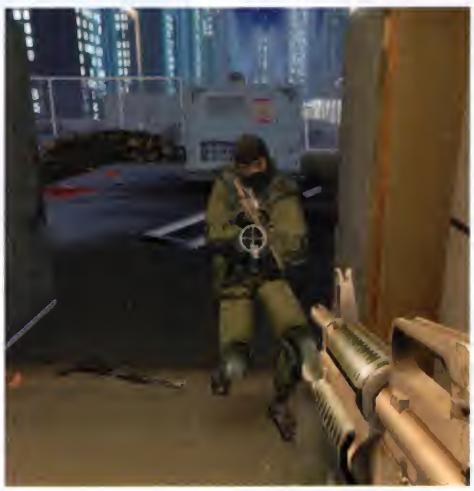
There's still plenty of originality out there if you look hard enough – true innovation is always going to be buried under mounds of cash-in clones. PCZ

READER REVIEWS

SOLDIER OF FORTUNE 2

PC ZONE ISSUE 118 – 92%

We said... "The bloodiest game in the world is back, but this time there's a brilliant game cowering beneath the carnage. One of the best shooters we've ever played..."



The problem with the original was the bloody awful storyline – I still haven't got a clue what it was all about. You spent all your time revelling in dismembering the useless AI enemies, but this wasn't a good thing, as the game quickly got really boring. By contrast, the AI in the sequel is amazing and the enemies aren't so stupid they'll just run straight into a hail of bullets that have just cut down one of their comrades.

The first level is a bit disappointing though. It's dark, raining and the terrorists are all wearing the same cheap anorak. Get past this and the game is excellent and varied in missions and environment. Some of the levels are so much fun that no matter how often you play them you'll still get the same kick out of them.

The only real flaws are the strangely introduced stealth levels. What the hell are they doing in such a violent game? Thankfully keeping yourself hidden isn't essential so you can crawl about like a pansy or run straight in blowing heads off – if you haven't guessed I prefer the second option. This has to be the best FPS I have ever played. Bloody brilliant.

Richard Glasgow

SCORE: 95%

E NOW...VOTE NOW...VOTE NOW...VOTE NOW...VOTE NOW...VOTE NOW...VOTE NOW...VOTE NOW...VOTE NOW...

GOLDEN JOYSTICK Awards 2002

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VOTE FOR THE HOTTEST GAMES OF THE LAST 12 MONTHS

THE VOTING

The industry's biggest awards bash, The Golden Joystick Awards, is where YOU, the playing public, get to vote YOUR favourite recent releases into gaming's Hall Of Fame.

So what are your favourite moments? Have you made it off Omaha Beach in *Medal Of Honor* without dying, or completed *GTA III* without getting arrested or hospitalised once?

Do you think these or other recent releases rank among the finest gaming experiences ever, and that the fantastically talented developers behind them deserve some sort of medal for services to gaming? Well, **here's your chance to register your appreciation** and vote for the hottest games of the last 12 months.

There are 14 award categories for you to vote in (see right), and to qualify the titles must have been released between 15.09.01 and 15.09.02. Voting is easy, simply visit **www.goldenjoystick.co.uk** and submit your vote.

Every voter will be entered into a prize draw, which means you could be one of the five lucky gamers to **WIN TWO TICKETS to the GOLDEN JOYSTICK AWARDS** to be held in London on Friday October 25. Jonathon Ross will be the presenter, so vote now for your chance to attend this exclusive ceremony. Two runners-up will win an amazing **VIRGIN MEGASTORE** one minute '**GRAB & DASH**'. How much can you grab? (Terms and conditions apply.)

You can enter all or just some of the categories on the right. Make sure you have your say – vote online now at **www.goldenjoystick.co.uk.** Voting is open now.

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- → PC game of the year
- → PS2 game of the year
- → Xbox game of the year
- → GameCube game of the year
- → Handheld game of the year
- → Online game of the year
- → British developer of the year
- → Publisher of the year
- → Hardware of the year **(Sponsored by Universal Interactive Studio)**
- → Game innovation of the year *(PC)*
- → Game innovation of the year *(console)*
- → Most wanted game of Christmas 2002
- → Retailer of the year **(Sponsored by EA Games)**

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Awards are subject to change

vote online at: **www.goldenjoystick.co.uk**

THE PCZONE A-LIST

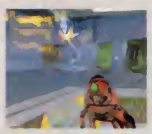
SHOOTERS

MEDAL OF HONOR

It may have taken years but finally there's a shooter worthy of toppling *Half-Life*. Brilliant level design, surprisingly good AI, an unparalleled sense of atmosphere and intensity, not to mention beautifully scripted scenes. It's also the first game that Richie has finished three times in as many months, and the first FPS Rhianna has finished in her life, which gives you some indication of the game's worth.

PUB EA **DEV** 2015

PCZ ISSUE 112



HALF-LIFE: GENERATIONS

Unchallenged for three years, *Half-Life* redefined its genre with a cracking atmosphere and a compelling plot. It now comes bundled with the excellent Opposing Force add-on pack and the world's favourite mod, *Counter-Strike*.

PUB Vivendi **DEV** Valve Software **PCZ ISSUE 71**

NEW ENTRY MAFIA

From the makers of *Hidden & Dangerous* and just as compelling, this is the game of every great gangster film ever made. Tense missions, superb atmosphere, great AI – it's a classic in every respect. Badabing!

PUB Take 2 **DEV** Illusion **PCZ ISSUE 119**

JEDI KNIGHT II: JEDI OUTCAST

The first *Star Wars* game to be awarded a *PC ZONE* Classic award since the original *Jedi Knight* back in 1997. This is more than just a simple FPS, it's frustrating, rewarding and extremely good fun. A new hope has come.

PUB Activision **DEV** Raven **PCZ ISSUE 115**

SOLDIER OF FORTUNE II

The bloodiest game in the world is back, but this time there's a brilliant game cowering beneath the carnage. Sublime AI is the chief culprit and if you can stomach the violence this is a must buy.

PUB Activision **DEV** Raven **PCZ ISSUE 118**

ALIENS VS PREDATOR 2

If we rated games on atmosphere and tension *AvP2* would've been the highest-scoring game ever. The multiplayer game and 3D engine brought the score down, but for scares nothing can touch this three-way fragfest.

PUB Vivendi **DEV** Monolith **PCZ ISSUE 110**

MAX PAYNE

It's not big and it's not clever, but for style and content *Max Payne* receives top marks. The character animations and soon-to-be-copied-by-everyone Bullet Time mode are the real stars, it's just a shame it only lasts a few hours.

PUB Take 2 **DEV** Remedy **PCZ ISSUE 107**

RETURN TO CASTLE WOLFENSTEIN

A mixed bag. Visually it might be at the top of the pile, but the single-player game has been completely eclipsed by *Medal Of Honor*. Forget that and head for the multiplayer action instead, where the game comes into its own.

PUB Activision **DEV** Gray Matter/Nerve **PCZ ISSUE 112**

UNREAL TOURNAMENT

Unreal Tournament's multiplayer mode is more than a match for *Quake III*, with a combination of well-designed maps and diverse gameplay. Single-player mode is a tad short, but it's still more of a challenge than most.

PUB Infogrames **DEV** Epic/Digital Extremes **PCZ ISSUE 81**

QUAKE III ARENA

Still going strong with a constant stream of mods and add-ons, *Quake III* is probably the best game for pure deathmatch multiplayer, but in terms of numbers it's trounced online by *Half-Life* and *Counter-Strike*.

PUB Activision **DEV** id **PCZ ISSUE 87**

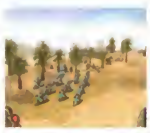
STRATEGY

SHOGUN: WARLORDS

Take command of enormous armies, engage in epic and bloody battles, send ninjas to assassinate generals and conquer your way through feudal Japan. This edition further improves the game's capable 3D engine, gives you greater customisation over your units and also lets you play as the Mongols. Copious in-game options never get in the way of the instant playability. *Shogun* will blow you away.

PUB EA **DEV** Creative Assembly

PCZ ISSUE 89



WARRIOR KINGS

A visually stunning and hugely ambitious RTS that melds the strategic diversity of *Battle Realms* with the huge 3D rolling landscapes of *Shogun*. With a compelling story to boot, no strategy fan should be without a copy.

PUB Microids **DEV** Black Cactus **PCZ ISSUE 114**

COMMANDOS 2

There have been a few imitators of the squad-based strategy of *Commandos* but none have come close to this sequel. If, like us, you loved the first game, you'll love this massive, preposterously detailed follow-up even more.

PUB Eidos **DEV** Pyro Studio **PCZ ISSUE 108**

COSSACKS: EUROPEAN WARS

There are 8,000 troops at your disposal in this historically accurate RTS. Smooth unit movement, a 3D landscape with real physics modelling and great graphics and sound make it truly absorbing. An essential purchase.

PUB CDV **DEV** GSC Gameworld **PCZ ISSUE 101**

Z: STEEL SOLDIERS

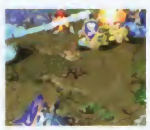
Z will re-ignite your passion for strategy games with its fast-paced in-yer-face action that allows you to get down and dirty from the off. The AI is superb, and as it's entirely mouse-driven, it's simple and easy to get into.

PUB EON **DEV** Bitmap Brothers **PCZ ISSUE 101**

ETHERLORDS

This unexpected gem might just be good enough to convert those who immediately associate 'turn-based' with the word 'geek'. The visuals and sound are stunning, the tactical variety truly staggering – fantastic stuff.

PUB JoWooD **DEV** Nival Interactive **PCZ ISSUE 112**



NEW ENTRY WARCRAFT III

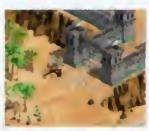
While not a huge departure from the original, *Warcraft III* is an extremely enjoyable and polished package. The storyline is brilliant and the multiplayer action dangerously addictive. Simple, solid entertainment.

PUB VU Games **DEV** Blizzard **PCZ ISSUE 119**

BATTLE REALMS

Emerging from the quagmire of all too similar RTS games this is a genuinely ground-breaking strategy game. It does have its flaws which include a tedious plot, but the great use of sound, visuals and gameplay shine through.

PUB Ubi Soft **DEV** Liquid Entertainment **PCZ ISSUE 111**



AOEII: GOLD EDITION

It might not be radically different from the original, but sometimes evolution is just as good as revolution. In *AOEII* the gameplay is honed to perfection with balanced units and strong single and multiplayer campaigns. A great RTS.

PUB Microsoft **DEV** Ensemble Studios **PCZ ISSUE 84**

SUDDEN STRIKE

Sudden Strike mixes WWII action with classic RTS gameplay in order to create a compelling strategy title. Its large-scale battles, huge selection of units and superb interface make it a must for RTS fans.

PUB CDV **DEV** Fireglow **PCZ ISSUE 96**

Welcome to the *PC ZONE* A-List, the definitive buyer's guide for all discerning PC gamers. The games that grace these pages aren't just good, they're the best of the best in their respective genres, and our list is continually updated to show how each game stands in relation to its peers. Get in.

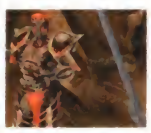
◀ ROLE-PLAYING GAMES ▶

DEUS EX

Warren Spector is one of the true visionaries of the computer game medium, and this is his magnum opus. Combining the finer elements of *Half-Life*, *System Shock 2* and *Thief*, *Deus Ex* is an RPG of complex beauty and a true revolution in computer gaming. The fascinating sci-fi plot and amazing attention to detail, combined with unparalleled player freedom are just some of the reasons why *Deus Ex* is a landmark in gaming.

PUB Eidos **DEV** Ion Storm

PCZ ISSUE 93



THE ELDER SCROLLS III: MORROWIND

One of the most impressive RPGs we've seen in years. A massively open-ended world full of beautiful visuals, superb depth of gameplay and innovative character development make this a classic that will keep you totally absorbed.

PUB Ubi Soft **DEV** Bethesda Softworks **PCZ ISSUE 117**

NEVERWINTER NIGHTS

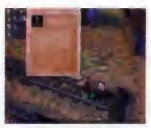
The makers of the epic *Baldur's Gate* series prove they are still a leading force in the world of RPGs with this glorious hardcore 3D adventure. It features great single and multiplayer options, along with a very accessible toolkit.

PUB Infogrames **DEV** Bioware **PCZ ISSUE 118**

PLANESCAPE: TORMENT

An incredible game from Black Isle, using the *Baldur's Gate* engine. With a compelling story, well-scripted dialogue and the best character development we've seen in any game of its kind, this is a dark, adult scorcher of an RPG.

PUB Interplay **DEV** Black Isle Studio **PCZ ISSUE 87**



DUNGEON SIEGE

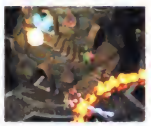
Graphically brilliant, massively enjoyable and highly immersive, *Dungeon Siege* is one of the best RPGs to date and only misses out on a Classic because of the shortcomings in the narrative.

PUB Microsoft **DEV** Gas Powered Games **PCZ ISSUE 115**

SYSTEM SHOCK 2

Definitely one of the most original and disturbing games to hit the PC, *System Shock 2* manages to successfully mix the genres of role-playing, action and adventure into one. Play it with the lights off if you're hard enough.

PUB EA **DEV** Irrational Games **PCZ ISSUE 80**



BALDUR'S GATE II

The original *Baldur's Gate* was hailed as one of the best story-driven role-playing games ever. The sequel isn't vastly different, but it's bigger, better and still extremely addictive. An essential for anyone interested in PC role-playing.

PUB Interplay **DEV** Bioware **PCZ ISSUE 96**

THRONE OF DARKNESS

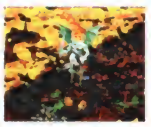
An enjoyable party-based strategic hack 'n' slash from the developers of *Diablo* sees you take command of seven samurai as they fight their way through feudal Japan. Not for everyone, granted, but worth a look.

PUB Vivendi **DEV** Click Entertainment **PCZ ISSUE 96**

FREEDOM FORCE

Control your own group of superheroes in this immersive and fully destructible comic book world. It may not be the most sophisticated and beardy of RPGs, but *Freedom Force* is unadulterated bubble-gum fun at its best.

PUB EA **DEV** Irrational Games **PCZ ISSUE 115**



DIABLO II

The sequel to the definitive hack 'n' slash took all the qualities of the original into a massive world of beautifully simplistic yet compelling gameplay. With a huge online community and an excellent expansion, *DII* is as addictive as ever.

PUB VU Games **DEV** Blizzard **PCZ ISSUE 84**

◀ ACTION/ADVENTURE ▶

GRIM FANDANGO

If you've followed the successes of LucasArts from the early days of *Monkey Island*, *Sam & Max* and *Day Of The Tentacle*, this is a must-buy. The comic interaction between Manny and Glottis is a high watermark for scripting in games, while sublime graphics and laugh-out-loud humour ensure it's at the top of its genre. A word of warning though: it's bloody hard and if your mind doesn't work laterally you'll be playing it until the day you die.

PUB Activision **DEV** LucasArts

PCZ ISSUE 71

SOUL REAVER 2

While this latest episode in the saga of Raziel takes few risks with the action/adventure formula, it's a consummately constructed example of the genre, with a compelling storyline, satisfying combat and excellent puzzle dynamics.

PUB Eidos **DEV** Crystal Dynamics **PCZ ISSUE 111**

DISCWORLD NOIR

Although the point-and-click adventure game is dying, *Discworld Noir* is still very much alive. It's darker in style than previous *Discworld* games and all the better for it in our opinion.

PUB Infogrames **DEV** Perfect Entertainment **PCZ ISSUE 79**

SEVERANCE: BLADE OF DARKNESS

Anyone who doesn't mind being splattered with the kind of gore rarely seen outside *Soldier Of Fortune* will find much to like in *Severance*. But it stands out from the usual hack 'n' slasher with its amazing engine and combo system.

PUB Codemasters **DEV** Rebel Act Studios **PCZ ISSUE 98**

THE NOMAD SOUL

Distinctly odd, but original nonetheless. *The Nomad Soul* is a huge intricate world populated by lap dancers and David Bowie. At turns adventure, beat 'em up and platformer, it's insanely ambitious and almost pulls it off.

PUB Eidos **DEV** Quantic Dream **PCZ ISSUE 83**

HITMAN: CODENAME 47

Reminiscent of *Leon* and *Day Of The Jackal*, *Hitman* recreates the dubious thrill of carrying out a contract killing. Snipe from rooftops, disguise yourself in your victims' uniforms and walk away from explosions with calm elegance.

PUB Eidos **DEV** IO Interactive **PCZ ISSUE 98**

PROJECT EDEN

Giving you control of four variously skilled operatives in a nightmarish future metropolis, *Eden* is at once predictable and innovative. The combat and AI may be dull, but the varied puzzles and raft of cool gadgetry make up for it.

PUB Eidos **DEV** Core Design **PCZ ISSUE 107**

INDIANA JONES AND THE INFERNAL MACHINE

LucasArts moves away from the point-and-click genre and into *Tomb Raider* territory for its latest Indy game, but with many of the adventure elements still in place. The result is surprisingly good, but not for traditionalists.

PUB Activision **DEV** LucasArts **PCZ ISSUE 84**

ESCAPE FROM MONKEY ISLAND

One of the hardest things to do in a game is to make your audience laugh with you rather than at you, and *Escape From Monkey Island* is undoubtedly one of the most genuinely funny games to come out in recent years.

PUB Activision **DEV** LucasArts **PCZ ISSUE 98**

METAL GEAR SOLID

Although it's been ported pretty much identically from the console version (with a few graphical improvements), *MGS*'s tense gameplay, well-designed levels and variety of challenging bosses make it a thing of beauty.

PUB Microsoft **DEV** Konami **PCZ ISSUE 96**

GOD GAMES

BLACK & WHITE

Although it had its critics we still stand by our original verdict. Peter Molyneux's vision is pure and the design of the game both breaks boundaries and serves as a blueprint for the future. The add-on *Creature Isle* is also available, which cuts down on micro-management and lets you guide your creature through a variety of mini-games. Overall we think it's pure genius in a box.

PUB EA **DEV** Lionhead Studios

PCZ ISSUE 100

CIVILIZATION III

Civilization III sticks to the same compulsive gameplay that made the first two games so popular. Die-hard *Civ* fans will relish the improved visuals and animation, while the new user-friendly interface makes the game accessible to the first-timer. Brings to mind the maxim 'if it ain't broke…'

PUB Infogrames **DEV** Firaxis Games **PCZ ISSUE 111**

THE SIMS

Revolutionary at birth, the concept has since been diluted through numerous add-ons and an unhealthily long stay in the charts. It's now little more than a cash cow for Electronic Arts, but you can't help but admire the strength of community and the fact that it's still selling by the bucketload.

PUB EA **DEV** Maxis/EA **PCZ ISSUE 87**

CAESAR III

Starting from scratch, you've got to build a majestic Roman city and ensure a harmonious life for your citizens by balancing their work, health and entertainment needs. So what? So it's probably one of the most utterly absorbing and addictive god sims in existence. Hail Caesar.

PUB VU Games **DEV** Impressions **PCZ ISSUE 70**

SIMCITY 3000

Ten years on, the offspring of the original building game *SimCity* still remains as addictive as it ever was. Little was broken, and little was fixed. With new buildings and an enhanced transport system, *SimCity 3000* is a must for old-timers and new addicts alike.

PUB EA **DEV** Maxis **PCZ ISSUE 74**

ZEUS: MASTER OF OLYMPUS

Straight from the creators of *Pharaoh* and *Caesar III* comes this intricate yet hugely playable micro-management god game. Despite its slightly cartoonish look *Zeus* is highly addictive, but suffers slightly from its lack of multiplayer options and an undeveloped combat system.

PUB VU Games **DEV** Impressions Games **PCZ ISSUE 97**

ROLLERCOASTER TYCOON

Design and build your own theme park and then pack it full of the most fiendish rides your imagination can conjure up, while trying to keep the cash and the punters coming in. From rickety wooden dippers to *Nemesis*-style, white-knuckle gurners, *RollerCoaster Tycoon* is hugely addictive. Be warned.

PUB Infogrames **DEV** Chris Sawyer **PCZ ISSUE 75**

MONOPOLY TYCOON

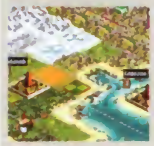
This mixture of the classic board game and a *Theme Park/SimCity*-style building sim is an admirable attempt at something a little different. Played in real-time, the aim is to make as much money as possible. Great fun for a while, but it quickly becomes repetitive.

PUB Infogrames **DEV** Deep Red **PCZ ISSUE 110**

DUNGEON KEEPER 2

The ultimate 'it's good to be bad' game, *Dungeon Keeper* was a great idea and *DK2* takes the essence and humour of the original, corrects all the mistakes, vastly improves the graphics, and adds a myriad of new features that build wisely on the original concept.

PUB EA **DEV** Bullfrog **PCZ ISSUE 79**



CALL TO POWER II

It might not have the official endorsement, but *Call To Power II* is a spiritual successor to one of the greatest strategy games of all time, *Civilization II*. The gameplay is familiar but every element has been polished and the result is a hugely challenging and rewarding experience. It's still well worth seeking out.

PUB Activision **DEV** Activision **PCZ ISSUE 98**

SPORT

CHAMPIONSHIP MANAGER: 01/02

Another year, another update and yet another improvement on the greatest sports management game of all time, one that will literally consume your life. New features this time around include masked attributes (forcing you to scout for talent), updated team and player stats, and all of the new rules and regulations imposed by FIFA for the new season. Pure genius.

PUB Eidos **DEV** Sports Interactive

PCZ ISSUE 108

VIRTUA TENNIS

Who would have believed that this console favourite would translate so well to the PC? Its control interface is supremely intuitive, while the AI is massively challenging. Best of all, though, are its truly sublime multiplayer options.

PUB Empire Interactive **DEV** Rowan Software **PCZ ISSUE 114**

TONY HAWK'S PRO SKATER 3

This 3rd edition of Tony Hawk's classic skateboarding game is an absolute joy to play. It features enormous levels, even more interaction and a totally kick-ass soundtrack.

PUB Activision **DEV** Neversoft Entertainment **PCZ ISSUE 98**

VIRTUAL POOL 3

Easily the best cue-based game around, *VP3* features some near perfect physics and excellent graphics. The career and multiplayer modes are highly entertaining, and a superb tutorial will have you clearing up in no time.

PUB Interplay **DEV** Celeris **PCZ ISSUE 99**

FIFA 2002

Still the best PC football game despite some irksome flaws, this graphically improved update introduces nuances such as through-ball and one-two options, which provide greater variation but less passing accuracy.

PUB Electronic Arts **DEV** EA Sports **PCZ ISSUE 110**

MULTIPLAYER MODS

COUNTER-STRIKE

Counter-Strike is the game that has completely dominated the online world for more than a year now, and its popularity still shows absolutely no sign of abating. With more servers in more countries than any other mod and a totally dedicated army of fans, *Counter-Strike* has really proved that bedroom coding is alive and well and is in better health than it ever has been.

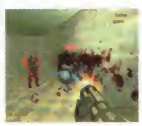
WEB www.counter-strike.net

PCZ ISSUE 109

DAY OF DEFEAT

Currently in its second beta, this WWII-themed *Half-Life* mod is being played by more people online than both *Medal Of Honor* and *Wolfenstein*. It's atmospheric, highly realistic and superbly designed.

WEB www.dayofdefeatmod.com **PCZ ISSUE 115**



TEAM FORTRESS CLASSIC

A great *Half-Life* squad-based action game with nine classes, a wide variety of weaponry and many map variations. The action focuses on infiltrating enemy bases, and the frantic gameplay requires more manual dexterity than most.

WEB http://www.planethalflife.com/tfc **PCZ ISSUE 94**

STRIKE FORCE

Hot on the heels of *Counter-Strike* comes this superb total conversion mod for *Unreal Tournament*. It boasts outstanding maps and attention to detail, including heartbeat monitors that measure stress and infrared laser dot aiming.

WEB www.strikeforcecenter.com **PCZ ISSUE 109**

JAILBREAK: POW

Two sides, two jails and a lot of fun. If you get fragged you get jailed and you have to stay until you're released. When all the team is in jail you get executed. All-in-all, one of the best *Q3* mods available.

WEB www.planetquake.com/bkp **PCZ ISSUE 109**

DRIVING GAMES

GRAND THEFT AUTO III

It may have taken its time getting onto the PC, but *Grand Theft Auto III* was definitely worth the wait. Offering you both traditional linear missions and a wonderfully freeform world ripe for exploring, the game boasts stunning graphics and superb attention to detail. It's a great spin on both the driving and shooting genres and we can assure you that you'll love this noisy orgy of violence and speed. Crime really does pay.

PUB Take 2 **DEV** Rockstar **PCZ ISSUE 117**

NEW ENTRY GRAND PRIX 4

You won't find a more accurate racing sim. Graphically lush and full of anal detail, Geoff Crammond's latest effort offers in-depth telemetry and a staggering number of options. *Grand Prix 4* is leading the grid in the world of racing sims.

PUB Infogrames **DEV** Simergy **PCZ ISSUE 119**

COLIN MCRAE 2.0

This is still the benchmark rally title and looks set to remain so until *Colin McRae 3.0* appears. The graphics are fantastic, the detail is overwhelming and the cards handle beautifully. So if you are on the look-out for the definitive rally game, this is it.

PUB Codemasters **DEV** Codemasters **PCZ ISSUE 110**

NEW ENTRY CRAZY TAXI

One of the best arcade conversions to the PC that we've seen for a long time. *Crazy Taxi* is a bright, colourful and in-yer-face driving experience that's built on solid arcade values and good old fashioned insanity.

PUB Empire Interactive **DEV** Hitmaker/Strangelite **PCZ ISSUE 119**

MIDTOWN MADNESS 2

Buckle up for some high-speed action as you race around London and San Francisco. The original *MM* was a belter, but with improved cars, races and controls, this is even better. We reckon it's the definitive arcade racer.

PUB Microsoft **DEV** Angel Studios **PCZ ISSUE 96**

3D ACTION / STRATEGY

OPERATION FLASHPOINT GOLD

Now available with the tricky Red Hammer add-on, *Flashpoint* has become to tactical action what *Half-Life* was to shooters. Fight on foot or in tanks, fly planes or even direct an entire platoon, this game is total war – in your face and on a massive scale. The graphics are an acquired taste, but they convey a sense of wide-open warfare perfectly. It's the ultimate military simulation, with a stunning atmosphere and superb missions.

PUB Codemasters **DEV** Bohemia Interactive **PCZ ISSUE 104**

GHOST RECON

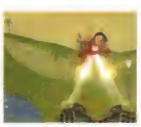
A superb squad-based shooter, which masterfully combines tactics and action. The levels range from wide-open landscapes to claustrophobic city streets, in what is a stunning evocation of special forces warfare.

PUB Ubi Soft **DEV** Red Storm Entertainment **PCZ ISSUE 110**

HIDDEN & DANGEROUS

Looking old and with most of the original bugs intact, *Hidden & Dangerous* is still a great WWII game featuring some incredibly varied levels and a stirring soundtrack. Look out for the supposedly bug-free Deluxe release next issue.

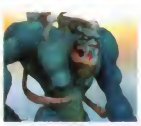
PUB Take 2 **DEV** Illusion Softworks **PCZ ISSUE 79**



HOSTILE WATERS

A brilliant RTS/action game you can play purely strategically or up close and personal. Inspired by the 16-bit classic *Carrier Command*, it's just a shame there aren't any multiplayer options.

PUB Rage **DEV** Rage Software **PCZ ISSUE 101**



GIANTS: CITIZEN KABUTO

This mammoth and original 3D action/strategy game includes RTS, RPG, real-time and third-person shooter combat elements. It's also rather funny and features near-naked women with blue skin.

PUB Interplay **DEV** Planet Moon Studios **PCZ ISSUE 95**

ALL-TIME CLASSICS

MISSPENT YOUTH? WHO CARES, IT WAS GREAT FUN. THIS IS WHAT *DANIEL EMERY* DID WITH HIS LIFE

DOOM (PC)

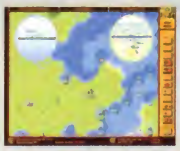
Oh what a surprise, someone else who thinks *Doom* is the greatest game of all time. Because it is, of course. Anyone who thinks otherwise shouldn't be allowed to mingle with the general public unsupervised. You don't need to be told what it was about, just bow down to the God of all games and say "Hallelujah!", John Romero is the way and the light.

ELITE (BBC B)

Quite possibly the ultimate game ever in the history of anything. Ever. Months of my life went by with evenings parked two feet from the TV screen flying my Cobra III spaceship. One of the creators, Ian Bell, has put up a PC clone on his web site. http://www.iancgbell.clara.net/elite/pc/index.htm. Ah the memories…

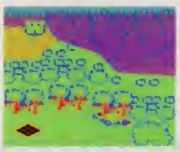
COUNTER-STRIKE (PC)

Oh baby. The Internet was made for two things: porn and *Counter-Strike*. No workplace with a LAN is complete without a post-work session of this game. And let's be honest, yelling across the office at lunchtime "Does anybody fancy looking at some porn?" is liable to get you a P45 quicker than you can say "diminished responsibility, me'lud."



PANZER GENERAL (PC)

While this game sold nearly as many copies in Germany as *Mein Kampf*, it didn't really do much in the UK. Which is a travesty, as *Panzer General* took the turn-based strategy genre and stood it on its head. Fantastic WWII maps, accurate units and the ability to invade and dive-bomb the Whitehouse with Stukas. Lovely.



TWIN KINGDOM VALLEY (BBC B)

OK, so *The Hobbit* was the first ever graphical adventure game. But I was of the 'posh kid' generation who had the BBC B and not a Spectrum. So while the proles swapped pirate copies of tapes in the school corridors, we micro-elite were swearing at the five-and-a-quarter inch floppy discs of old. Oh yeah, this game was pretty good, too…

EVERQUEST (PC)

More addictive than crack, *EverQuest* has been responsible for countless divorces, a few murders and the loss of any remaining credibility its players might have. Two years since its release, it is still far and away the most popular fantasy MMORPG around, with 80,000 people logging on every night. And yes, it has elves in it.

SECRET WEAPONS OF THE LUFTWAFFE (PC)

While most sane 20-year-olds were out taking drugs, getting laid and complaining they weren't teenagers any more, the *SWOTL* addicts were jumping into Nazi aircraft and hurling themselves at American bombers. No wonder the baby boom ended.

SID MEIER'S CIVILIZATION (PC)

Second only to *Elite* in the Hall of Fame, Sid's seminal classic had you playing God over your chosen race. Starting in 4,000 BC, you had to lead your people to the conquest of space, while surviving the onslaught of the other tribes scattered round the globe. Nuclear conflict, medieval hordes and resource management – the game had it all.

WARBIRDS (PC)

OK, I confess: I have a passing interest in WWII aviation. OK, more of an obsession. So *WarBirds* (in all its various incarnations) meant that my schoolboy fantasies of flying a Spitfire and gunning down Germans could be realised. Well in a virtual, stuck-in-front-of-my-PC kind of way. But as soon as they invent time travel, I'm there.

CHUCKIE EGG (DRAGON 32/PC)

I enjoy most platform games as much as I enjoy dental extractions or finding blood on the loo roll. Not so *Chuckie Egg*. Running about stealing birdseed and eggs from the wandering birds (and the dreaded giant chicken in a cage) was the pioneer of animal cruelty in computer games. So that's where Lara got her ideas from…

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RETRO ZONE

ANOTHER DOSE OF GAMING NOSTALGIA

"*Elite* – classic space-faring action or just a long-distance haulage sim with knobs on"

Rings around Uranus. (*You're fired – Ed.*)

RETRO ZONE MARCH 1994

The American Institute of Physics discovers that high-energy sulphur-sulphur collisions at the CERN SPS accelerator exhibit greater 'stopping power' or 'stickiness' than proton-proton collisions. Which is news to *Paul Presley*

FRONTIER: ELITE II

With its dull and dragging gameplay, why wasn't *Elite II* the final *Frontier*?

ELITE – classic space-faring action that will live on throughout the ages? Or just a long-distance haulage sim with knobs on? The original will be forever droned on about by boring bores whose boring exploits about their boring half-hour journeys across boring space before docking with boring space stations are about as boring as boring can get. And I'm one of the people who liked the game.

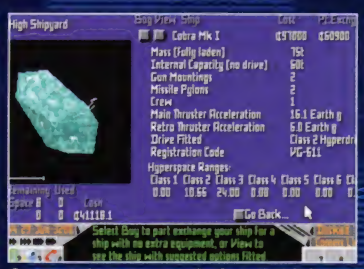
Elite was a classic, yes, and as we showed last month it changed the gaming world forever, but come 1994, David Braben, one half of the original programming team, decided it needed updating.

What Braben did for *Frontier* was take every *Elite* fan's ultimate wish list and attempt to provide it in full. Flying ships other than the Cobra? You got it. Want to explore the surfaces of the planets? No problem. Want to fly proper missions instead of just trading and shooting? Go for it, Pedro. It was all there.

The only problem with it all was that *Frontier* was hideously late, meaning that by the time it appeared it was graphically dated. Other problems were with the combat and flight systems (realism may be worthy but does not make for good gameplay), repetitive missions and a general lack of atmosphere.

The second sequel – *Frontier: First Encounters* – did little to help any of this and in many ways made things worse (a story for another time). Hopes are high for the forthcoming *Elite IV*.

2001 in '94, not '68. If you follow me.



One previous owner. A vicar, I think.

Flying something other than a Cobra.

THE BEST OF THE REST

GABRIEL KNIGHT: SINS OF THE FATHER
(PC)
Tim Curry – cult hero or ham actor? He may be the kiss of straight-to-video death for films, but in the world of computer entertainment voice-over artistes, he and Mark Hamill reign supreme. This was the first of the gothic horror adventures from Sierra. A *ZONE* favourite.

TEMPEST 2000
(Atari Jaguar)
Poor old Geoff Minter. Heralded as an industry veteran, despite never having produced a game for a platform that lasts longer than two weeks before going belly-up. There are those that will argue to this day that *Tempest 2000* is the greatest videogame of all time. Three words – *Super Monkey Ball*.

BIING!: SEX, INTRIGEN UND SKALPELLE
(PC)
Described by the publishers as an "erotic hospital simulation" – although what's erotic about wino-filled A&E wards, terminally-ill patients and gastro-intestinal surgery is anyone's guess. Think *Theme Hospital* crossed with *Anal Nurses 4* and you get the idea.

C.I.T.Y. 2000 – LONDON
(PC)
Forget your PS2s and their photorealistic London-based games (ie *The Getaway*). You could get photorealistic London-based games on PC before people even knew what that was. A sort of interactive A-Z with a spy plot attached, the subtitle indicated sequels set in other cities. Never saw any though.

NEWS

GAMING NEWS FROM MARCH 1994

• *The Interactive Lovers' Guide* takes computer nerds through the ins and outs of making a baby. And it's pretty damn graphic: bush, cock, the lot. Large spinning balls in slightly more familiar locations to gamers were on offer in *Redshift* – a planetary guidebook to the cosmos.

• Flight stick specialists Thrustmaster wow audiences at a trade show with the latest in flight sim hardware add-ons – a full-size F-16 cockpit. Pretty soon every home has one, and flight simmers are worshipped by babes. Not.

• *Doom* arrives. The social life of *ZONE* departs.

GAMES THAT CHANGED THE WORLD

CHAMPIONSHIP MANAGER

A decade after the first incarnation hit the shelves, the most recent version of *Championship Manager* became the UK's fastest selling PC game of all time. *Steve Hill* speaks to the Collyer brothers about how the game has changed their world, and ours

GAME *Championship Manager*
DEVELOPER Sports Interactive
RELEASED December 1992
INFLUENCED CM2, CM3, CM4...

"WE LIVED IN the middle of f***ing nowhere and there was bugger all else to do apart from shag sheep."

As far as reasons for developing a world changing game go, it's not the most orthodox of explanations, but it's the one cited by *Championship Manager* co-creator Oliver Collyer. Older brother Paul is slightly more reserved, but concurs that the game did indeed come about "possibly because of the amount of time we had on our hands in deepest Shropshire!"

A generation of gamers can be eternally grateful for their geographical situation – and their disinterest in sheep – although the route from the Collyers' bedroom to mass appeal has been neither smooth nor fast. With no family history of supporting football, the brothers' interest in the sport was sparked by the '78 and '82 World Cups respectively.

A brief dabble with nearby Shrewsbury Town didn't take, the experience possibly marred by the fact that their father fell asleep at the first match he took them to. Hard as it is to comprehend now, Everton was the team of the day, and it was on their blue mast that the young Collyers pinned their hopes. Back in the virtual world, they also played the primitive football management games of the time. Paul remembers making his debut on "*Football Manager*, of course," whereas Oliver recalls playing "Erm, burp, um, *League Division One* by a company called Qualsoft, I think."

YOU BETTER YOU BET

Either way, they thought they could do better, and with the lofty ambition of getting their program listing printed in an early games magazine – as was the trend – they set about creating *Championship Manager*. Ironically, given the amount of magazine coverage they now garner, the listing never came about, but Saturdays were often spent playing the nascent game with their mates. They worked on it in their spare time for the next few years, juggling it with such other pursuits as music and education, Paul forming a band, and Oliver decamping to Leeds University. In fact, it was there that the *Championship Manager* story nearly ended before it had even begun. In possession of the sole copy of the game, Oliver had something of a premonition, and decided to hide the hard drive lest some dirty thieves screw the gaff.

As he recalls: "Yeah, luckily I snuck it under my wardrobe before we went out for the

PROFILES

Having worked on various guises of *Championship Manager* since 1985, you'd think the Collyer brothers would be sick of it by now. You'd be half right

NAME Paul Collyer
FIRST GAME *Championship Manager*
ROLE ON CHAMPIONSHIP MANAGER Programmer
NOW DOING Coding *CM4*, and living in Stockholm: "I get more done when I'm working from home in Sweden because there is no-one to play *Pro Evolution Soccer 2* with."

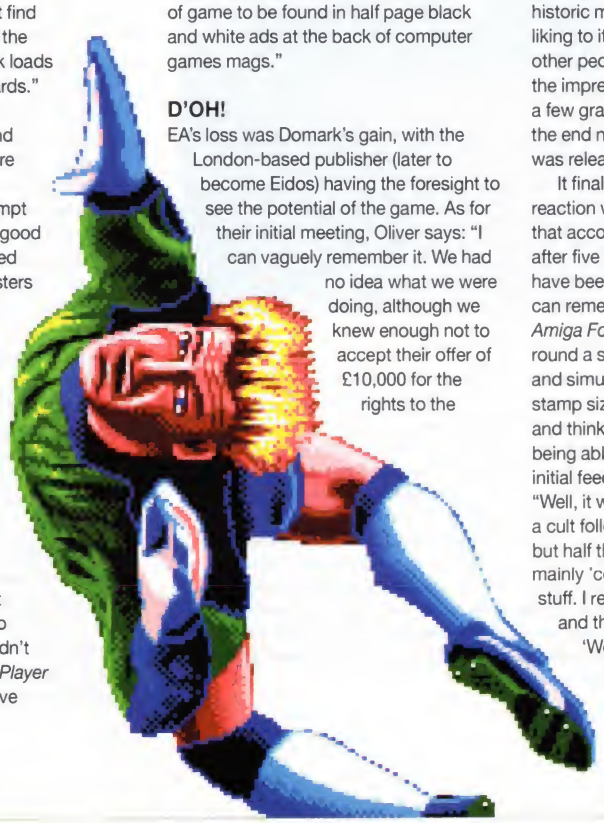
NAME Oliver Collyer
FIRST GAME *Championship Manager*
ROLE ON CHAMPIONSHIP MANAGER Designer
NOW DOING "Buggering off to live in Australia. I have plans but if I talk about them then it might f*** them up so I'm gonna say nothing."

"They said it wouldn't be able to compete with *Player Manager* 'cos it didn't have graphics"

OLIVER COLLYER
SPORTS INTERACTIVE

evening. The burglars took everything else but didn't find the hard drive which had the back-ups on it. They took loads of CDs though, the bastards."

Having survived that scare, work continued and as the game became more sophisticated, friends suggested that they attempt to get it published. So, a good five years after they started coding it, the two youngsters began hawking their wares. As Paul recalls: "I think we were fairly confident. Naïve, certainly!" The initial response was frustrating, the vast majority of money men dismissing the game on the basis of its lack of graphics. Electronic Arts was famously included in that number, and according to Oliver: "They said it wouldn't be able to compete with *Player Manager* 'cos it didn't have graphics, and that it was more the sort of game to be found in half page black and white ads at the back of computer games mags."



D'OH!

EA's loss was Domark's gain, with the London-based publisher (later to become Eidos) having the foresight to see the potential of the game. As for their initial meeting, Oliver says: "I can vaguely remember it. We had no idea what we were doing, although we knew enough not to accept their offer of £10,000 for the rights to the game forever." Paul also recalls that historic meeting: "The fella who took a liking to it, Kris Hall, was great. As for the other people there – they seemed to have the impression they could somehow 'bolt a few graphics' on to make it sellable. In the end nothing like that happened and it was released as was."

It finally hit the shelves in 1992, and reaction was far removed from the fervour that accompanies the game today. But after five years work, any response must have been welcome. As Oliver says: "I can remember first seeing it mentioned in *Amiga Format*. I was driving the trolley round a supermarket in Leeds (as you do) and simultaneously reading a postage-stamp size news item about the game and thinking about how ace it was and not being able to stop grinning." As for the initial feedback though, Oliver recalls: "Well, it was mixed. It started to build up a cult following with people who played it, but half the magazines thought it was shit, mainly 'cos of its lack of graphics and stuff. I remember *PC Format* reviewed it and the reviewer started off by saying 'Well, I don't like football.' Well, I thought, why are you bloody reviewing it if you don't like

The mighty Chester adopt a continental style, which is certainly a first.

It might not look like much, but it launched a million virtual careers.

football? But *PC ZONE* was (as ever) on the money though, with launch editor Paul Lakin championing the game, a tradition that continues to this day."

With the first release under their belts, the next two years saw a series of updates and

improvements, even including two foreign league editions, *Championship Manager Italia* and *Guy Roux Manager* for France. Paul says: "The French version had some appalling translation problems. The legendary road sweeper playing behind the back four for one."

"The game came about because of the amount of time we had on our hands in deepest Shropshire"

PAUL COLLYER
CO-CREATOR CHAMPIONSHIP MANAGER

THE FUTURE: WHAT'S NEXT FOR CHAMP MAN?

CHAMPIONSHIP MANAGER 4, BRING IT ON...

With *CM3* having spawned no less than three updates, a bonafide sequel is long overdue, and that is exactly what is promised with the forthcoming *CM4*, due out by the end of the year. SI is remaining tight-lipped about specifics, although Paul Collyer did concede that "the depth we are going into especially in terms of the match engine excites me greatly." As for the danger of another famous delay, he says "the old philosophy of 'it will be out when its finished' is much harder to adhere to now, so the challenge is to get the game done and out to a deadline."

One person looking forward to it is Oliver Collyer, who for the first time has not been directly involved in the development. As he says: "One of the things I sometimes thought was strange about having co-written *CM* was that I never got to play it objectively. When I was picking my team, one half of my brain would be looking at the screen layout and trying to find faults in it, or I'd be aware of the underlying code and how it affects things. I couldn't just play it as a game. With *CM4* I can finally get to play *CM* as a true fan."

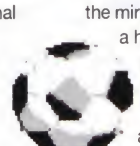
CAREER OPPORTUNITIES

At this stage, there was still no real concept that *Champ Manager* could provide a career, although in early 1994, Oliver began working alone on *CM2* from a spare room in his house in London. Meanwhile, Paul was busy with his band, Elevate, but still helped out in an advisory capacity. As he says: "I stepped back a bit to do the band, but Oliver was full steam at that time."

It was during this period that Sports Interactive was formed, and in early 1995 they gained their first employee, Oliver's housemate, Mark Woodger, who began collating the data that gives the game its authenticity, enlisting the help of fanzine writers and supporters to provide ratings for individual players.

After a series of (soon to become familiar) delays, *Championship Manager 2* was released in September 1995 and was an instant hit, lodging itself in the top 20 for the following year. A number of fansites sprung up, so SI decided to create one of their own, with the side effect of being able to recruit more researchers, who now come from about 80 different countries.

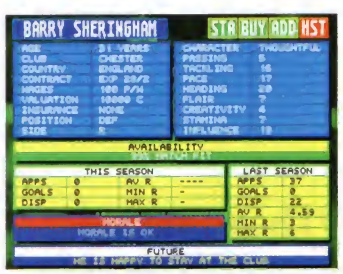
The success of *CM2* enabled SI to move into a small office in North London, and work continued on the traditional updates, with Paul now devoting more time to the cause. With each incarnation outselling the previous one, it became apparent that this could be a lucrative career. Paul realised this "ironically about the time things started working out with the band in about 1997 after *CM 97/98* came out and sold more than anyone expected. We were signed to Sony publishing, and I had to choose between sticking with music or games. No regrets, but I do miss the lads in the band – my best mates – who have all moved to the US."



CONQUERED

He may well have made the right decision. When *CM3* finally came out in March 1999 it made history by becoming the UK's fastest ever selling PC game, shifting 55,000 copies in the first week, more than doubling the previous record set by EA's *Command & Conquer*. By now with proper offices and a gradually increasing team, work continued all year round on the annual updates and of course the famous patches, which became almost as highly anticipated as the games themselves. Further projects have included an Xbox version, and even a quiz game.

As *Champ Man*'s popularity increased, stories began to emerge of the debilitating effects of its addictiveness. People sacrificed their education, lost their jobs, and in more extreme case, their wives, with the game cited in at least three



The original *CM* had fake player names, later rectified in an update.

divorce cases. I myself fell under its spell, reduced to a shambolic husk of a man, the mirror image of those I once mocked, a hollow-eyed nocturnal ghoul with a head full of stats and sink full of plates. Celebrity fans within the world of football were also named and shamed, including Manchester United striker Ole Gunnar Solskjaer and then Everton defender Michael Ball, who admitted to the absurd concept of having to sell himself within the

Choose your team and kiss your social life goodbye.

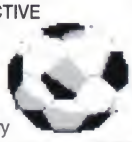
Initial contract negotiations were rudimentary to say the least, and have become considerably more complex over the years.

"I'm a control freak and I became gradually less happy the more people we had working on the game"

OLIVER COLLYER
FORMERLY OF SPORTS INTERACTIVE

game as he was asking for too much money.

It's not just a British phenomenon though, and in January 2001, Oliver Collyer was invited to the Far East by the Hong Kong Championship Manager Fan Club, no less. I was lucky enough to accompany him on the trip, and while clearly enjoying his newly-found ambassadorial role, it became apparent that his mind wasn't totally on the ball. In fact, during a multiplayer session with a group of fans, he admitted that it was the first time he had actually played that version of the game. Over the course of several days drinking, he as good as confessed that he had scarcely stepped foot in the office in the best part of a year.



A few months later, it came as only a mild surprise to learn that he had quit Sports Interactive.

COMPLETE CONTROL

He is now preparing to emigrate to Sydney, and explains: "I'd done it for long enough and had lost my enjoyment for writing the game. Really I'm a control freak and I became gradually less happy the more people we had working on the game with us. If I stayed at SI my role would have been more peripheral. Ideally, and with no disrespect to the lads in the office, I would have been most happy if my brother and I had been able to just lock ourselves away in a room to write the game on our own. Unfortunately this would have taken ten years and wouldn't exactly have been commercially viable. I have no regrets at all. In the last year I have had a fantastic time travelling around Australia with my girlfriend. And although I have left SI I still have contact with my brother and I know what is going on. I also have a say in decisions if I feel like it. I am proud of what I achieved and proud of SI and the people in it, but it was right for me to move on and I'm glad I did."

As for his brother leaving, Paul Collyer says: "He needed to. He'd never done anything else since day one and that is unsustainable. We have had some problems with areas of the game he specialised in but the team is strong enough to cope fortunately." Let's hope so, but more importantly, can we cope with waiting until the end of the year for *CM4*?

THE CHAMPIONSHIP HERITAGE

NOT MENTIONING THE SLEW OF ADD-ON PACKS, HERE'S A BRIEF HISTORY OF CHAMP MANAGER AND SPORTS INTERACTIVE

CHAMPIONSHIP MANAGER '92
The one that started it all. It featured eight different background pictures. Yes eight, Count 'em!

CHAMPIONSHIP MANAGER 2 '95
Introduced real player names, a photo of every league ground and the chance to manage at international level.

CHAMPIONSHIP MANAGER 3 '98
Simulated 15 leagues from around the world as well as youth and reserve teams for the English clubs.

CHAMPIONSHIP MANAGER QUIZ '01
Tedious footie quiz that wasn't worth the price of admission. An ill-advised spin-off venture from the SI boys.

ISS PRO EVOLUTION '01
The finest footie game ever (sorry, it's PS2 only) uses the Champ Man player database. Yes, they had to pay for it.

ISS PRO EVOLUTION 2 '02
PS2 owners will again get the benefit of the Champ Man team's experience thanks to Konami's clever hook up. Out this November, the player stats should be more detailed than ever.

CHAMPIONSHIP MANAGER 4 '02
Expected out by the end of the year, we hear rumblings of exciting new changes to the in-game engine.

EASTSIDE HOCKEY MANAGER '03
The latest brainchild of the SI crew takes the Champ Man formula to the major ice hockey leagues of the world. Out next year.

Just in case you're sick of these screenshots, we've included a photo of Everton striker Duncan Ferguson, one of the background pictures from *Champ Man 2*.

COMMENT

Are big, bad bosses a much-needed challenge to the end of a level, or an archaic device used by lazy, unimaginative game designers? *Adam Phillips* knows what he thinks

"The creature's health crawls down painfully slowly until on the 1,024th bullet, you are blown away"

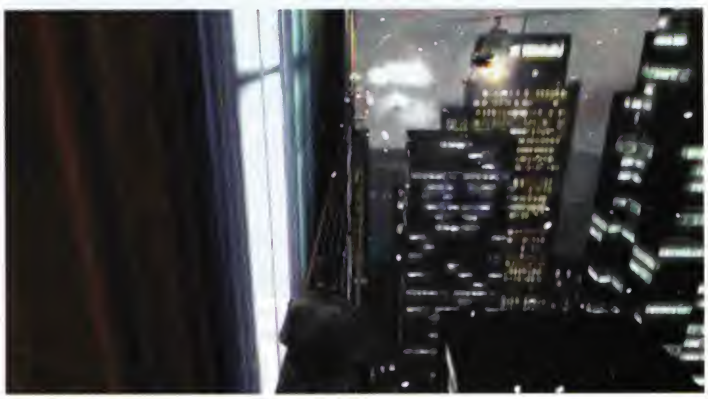
YOU'VE BLOWN the faces off 102 enemies, unlocked eight doors and managed four death-defying leaps. A cut-scene kicks in – you enter an arena/warehouse/somewhere you can't move on from. You're trapped. There's ammo and health scattered all over the place. You get that sinking feeling. "Oh shit," you sigh, "here we go... again."

It's the end-of-level baddie. The big one. Usually a mutation of everything that's gone before with bigger guns, a thicker hide and a huge amount of hit points. It's pretty much indestructible but thanks to some freakish gene, it always has one weak point. That you need to shoot over and over. And over again.

During this fracas, there are only two really important keys to remember – the Quicksave and the Quickload – as you slowly learn how to dodge its eventually predictable attacks and hammer home yet another bullet/rocket/shell. The creature's health crawls down painfully slowly and you continue bleary-eyed and with an ever-increasing sense of frustration as on the 1,024th bullet, you mis-time your shot and are blown away. Time to hit the Quickload button. Again.

At last you kill it. There's a mild sense of satisfaction but the whole thing was just too much hassle and too spun out by the game designers to even warrant anything approaching a victory cheer. Then on you go, through another level, knowing that there's another even bigger/nastier/faster end-of-level boss awaiting you. Oh joy.

The trouble is that too many games out there do what I've described above.



***Max Payne* opted for an intelligent ending.**

Take *Return To Castle Wolfenstein*, for example. The end fight is like something out of the Dark Ages of game design. Circle. Shoot. Circle. Shoot. Repeat 100 times. *Red Faction* and *Soldier Of Fortune 2* are as bad. But they're all topped by the tragically hilarious scene in *Hitman* where the coke-loving Columbian druglord requires 592 bullets to be toppled. And every time you land a shot, the game flicks to an unnecessary cut-scene with him goading you on – retarded is the nicest way to describe whoever came up with that gaming nugget.

There have been games that have tackled the big showdown more creatively. While *Max Payne* had its fair share of big bad guys littered throughout the end of its levels, the end of the game was genuinely surprising. You're stuck on top of the tower. The baddette's about to get away by helicopter. Normally in a shoot 'em up, it would be you versus the helicopter and its machine guns. You'd spend 15 minutes mindlessly blasting at the hovering 'copter until it goes down in flames. But no, instead, you need to take out the four cables holding the towering radio mast with your sniper rifle and then chuck a grenade at it. That way it can come crashing down on the 'copter, sending the bad gal to her fiery death. It was much more satisfying, requiring actual thought, a steady hand and intelligently used firepower. It could also be achieved quickly and efficiently once you'd worked out the winning formula.

There is room for end-of-level and end-of-game baddies, but shouldn't the emphasis be on this kind of simple strategy? On out-thinking the enemy and finishing them off quickly once you've worked out the weak links? Instead of pure firepower and game reloads. PCZ

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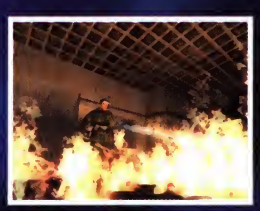

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